

LW HASTEN - Eddas and Vedas

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In 1915, the German geophysicist Alfred Wegener published the world's first treatise on the theory of continental drift. He had merely noticed what better maps had made obvious -- that the continents of the world fit together like puzzle pieces. Similarly, those who have read a variety of European mythology have felt much the same notion tugging at their consciousness; namely, that the myths of most of Europe appear to have once been united. Similarities run throughout, so that even the casual observer notes the pervasiveness of certain themes. It appeals to the "common sense" to believe that these myths, sharing substantial commonalities, are the offspring of like parents.

Comparative mythologists set out to determine if the various mythologies of the European continent were indeed related, and immediately the question grew more complex. No one is certain of where, when or by whom most of the myths have been composed, and these details can be impossibly difficult to trace. In addition, mythology, unlike temples, cannot be studied in anything approaching isolation. It reflects the fundamental ideology of a people, and as such is related to every aspect of the society. Influenced by factors as various as language, social structure, physical environment and foreign contact, it cannot simply be read in the bricks. When one does attempt to read ideology into physical artifacts, the results cannot help but be speculative.

Particularly inviting to such comparisons are the mythologies of the Indic *Vedas* and the Norse *Eddas*. Separated by a minimum of two thousand years and four thousand miles, one might expect them to bear little resemblance to one another. While superficially correct, it is also true that in certain ways they are remarkably similar, particularly when one considers their great temporal, linguistic and geographical distance from one another. They also serve well as temporal bookmarks in the history of religion.

The Indic *Rig Veda* has been dated by contextual evidence to approximately 1500 BCE, but there is reason to believe it may have been composed far earlier. Today the Hindus recognize four *Vedas*, of which the *Rig* is the earliest. While their written heritage dates only to about the 3rd century BCE, the *Vedas* are certainly much older. Sages known as *rishis* maintained an exacting oral tradition which ensured that the *Vedas* would be faithfully carried through time; held to be *shruti*, or divine revelation, their contents were not to be altered. They may well contain the earliest documentation of Indic polytheism known to modern scholars. If it can be said that the various mythologies of Europe are indeed sprung from the same ancestral mass, then the *Rig Veda* may be closest in age to that body.

The Norse *Eddas*, by contrast, are of comparatively late origin. Yet they hold the unique distinction of having survived what was generally the death blow of Christianity. As such, they are some of the only existing testaments to the state of European heathenry just before and during the Christian era. While the pagan works of the Greeks and Romans still stand, the *Eddas* are a valuable link to the Germanic tradition which, together with these classics, form the spine of our own. Viking in temperament and dated in a range from the eighth to the fourteenth centuries of the Common Era, they represent perhaps the “last stand” of European polytheism.

“*Edda*” means “grandmother,” and scholars have been unable to explain why the works bear that name. While many suggestions have been offered, the simplest has been all but overlooked: that the Eddic composer Snorri was simply invoking his wise grandmother, who may have told him the tales he transcribed. “*Edda*” itself may be derived from the Sanskrit *veda*, or sacred *vidyā*, both of which are terms for “knowledge;” cognates include the German *wissen*, the Swedish *veta*, and the old English *wit*, for “to know” (Titchenell, p. 20). Therefore it is fitting that a grandmother should convey knowledge. Together the *Eddas* and *Vedas* represent bookends on the shelf of European religious history; the further apart they are set, the more knowledge can be placed in between.

PART I – EVIDENCE FOR A COMMON FOUNDATION

1. The Indo-Europeans

It has long been obvious to scholars that certain mythological themes appear cross-culturally. One finds remarkably similar characters and stories throughout the diverse folklores of Europe and, indeed, the world. For centuries scholars have noted like elements in Vedic and Norse lore. Perhaps most emphatic in his views was the Swedish scholar Fredrik Sander, who in 1890 published his *Rigveda-Edda*, wherein he asserted that the mythology of the Norse is a direct descendant of the Indic Vedic tradition. He was quite convinced that the Eddas had succeeded in preserving the spirit of the Hindu myths even more faithfully than had the Greek and Roman traditions (Titchenell, p. 22).

The well-known comparativist Max Müller believed that the Eddic tradition actually preceded that of the *Vedas*, which seems incredible considering the great antiquity of Vedic society. Despite their problematic dating, the *content* of the myths is similar enough to encourage the speculation that they share a common parentage. Alternative hypotheses do not stand up to even the beginnings of scrutiny. The contention that the two mythologies arose independently to develop such striking correspondences invites the revitalization of Spencerian notions of “psychic unity.” Diffusionist arguments, too, seem to pale in the face of the great distance between India and the Scandinavian countries. Literary and linguistic evidence combines to suggest that a single body of ancient lore has grown and divided, transforming over time into a multitude of traditions which have traversed a significant part of the globe.

The beginnings of this hypothesis lie in the year 1767, when James Parsons published *The Remains of Japhet, being historical enquiries into the affinity and origins of the European languages*. Despite this early work, it is Sir William Jones, who, due to his academic credentials, is credited with the “discovery” in 1796 of the Indo-European family of languages. Both men, noting sweeping similarities in lexicon, proposed the hypothesis that the languages of Europe, Iran and India were all related through a common ancestor. That ancestor, they claimed, could be traced back in time to a point no earlier than Noah’s ark, from whence they were convinced all modern humans originated.

Despite the limits of their vision, the basic point is sound. There are indeed characteristics present in the family of Indo-European languages that suggest its members are united by common ancestry. One great proto-language is imagined to

have grown and splintered, producing branches as different from itself and from each other as they are removed in space and time. These languages have been carried across the continent by the people who spoke them, who in some cases may be as close genetically as they as linguistically.

The linchpin of this theory lies in the fact that reliable and systematic phonological shifting can be demonstrated to occur between the languages, as with the Greek *g* and the Germanic *k*: Greek *gyne*, Old Norse *kona* “woman”; Greek *genos*, Old Norse *kyn* “family”; or Greek *agros*, Old Norse *akr* “field” (Mallory, p. 13). Simple correspondences are also abundantly present, such as the Sanskrit *devas*, the Latin *deus*, Lithuanian *dievas*, Old Irish *dia* and the Old Norse plural *tivar*, which are all words for “gods” (Mallory, p. 128). Of particular interest to the present paper is the following set of correspondences:

	sky	father
Sanskrit	dyaus	pita
Greek	zeu	pater
Latin	Ju	piter
Umbrian	luve	patre
Illyrian	Dei	patyros
Hittite	^D Sius	
Proto-Indo-European	*dyeus	pEter

(Mallory, p. 128)

While J. P. Mallory is not willing to deduce the role of the divinity he has named here for us, it has nevertheless become a distinct possibility that the speakers of these related languages share a related mythology. For if all of them have a term for the “Sky-Father,” then surely they must all have an explanation for who he is; he must be provided with an underlying mythological base. Since they all refer to him in the same terms, the various mythologies must have common elements. While it is true

that myths appear to diffuse more readily than languages, some of these shared elements may in fact date to a time when the language, too, was shared.

Language, without writing, is nearly impossible for the archaeologist to trace. The migration of a pre-literate people leaves no linguistic clues in its wake, and when a site of occupation is discovered, it is difficult to determine its linguistic identity. While we may know where they went, how they made their pottery and what they ate for dinner, we can rarely know where they came from, who they were related to or what language they spoke. Archaeologists plod on despite this:

"The linguistic identity of archaeological cultures more distant from the historical record may be thought to lie beyond reasonable inference. This is not, however, an option open to the archaeologist engaged in the Indo-European homeland problem, and we will have to follow the archaeological evidence as best we can." (Mallory, p. 165)

When there is no system of writing, information can still be maintained and transmitted by an oral tradition. If the circumstances are right, eventually the body of knowledge will be preserved as text. In the case of mythology, as old as culture itself, that preservation occurs at an exceedingly late date. A body of lore having its origin at the time of linguistic unity would not have been written down until well after the language had undergone significant change. Linguistic change, along with thousands of years of culture, likely had profound effects on the resulting mythos. Whatever similarities remained must have been truly fundamental.

2. Dumézilian Comparative Mythology

It was the brilliant comparativist Georges Dumézil who first pointed out the tripartite division of Indo-European society. While this was not immediately apparent from the archaeological evidence, it was clear from the surviving mythologies. There is ample textual evidence to indicate that the ancient communities of the Indo-Europeans were characterized by a tripartite social class system and a tripartite

religious ideology, as is readily exemplified by the three “Aryan” castes of medieval and modern India . He discussed three fundamental principles around which this tripartite ideology revolved. Distilled simply, they are: “(1) the maintenance of cosmic and juridical order, (2) the exercise of physical prowess, and (3) the promotion of physical well-being” (C. Scott Littleton, in his introduction to Dumézil, p. xi). Dumézil called these “functions.”

The first function embraces sovereignty, and at the top of the social hierarchy stands a class of priests and shamans, such as the Indic Brahmins, to serve as administrators. Responsible for contracts both with the gods and between people, their tasks lie in different realms. Fittingly, the function is typically fulfilled on the divine level by a pair of sovereign gods such as Mitra and Varuna in Vedic India, Jupiter and Dius Fidius at Rome , and Óðinn and Týr in ancient Scandinavia . While one god concerns himself only with the divine, the affairs of humans are left to the other. The two of them rule together at the top of the divine hierarchy while the priests enjoy primary status among mortals.

The second function is characterized as military. It is expressed and fulfilled by a warrior class which is often the ruling class. Their duty is to defend the society against enemies as well as to promote its economic well-being through conquest and raiding. Examples include the Indic Kshatriyas, the Roman milites and the Norse Vikings. They are paralleled on the cosmic level by great warrior divinities such as the Vedic Indra, the Roman Mars, and the Norse Þórr (Thor). Of particular interest in this set of deities is the ambiguity inherent in the role of aggressor-defender. Þórr, smasher of Giants, while no one to antagonize, is also the warder of Miðgarð and the protector of human-kind. Both he and Indra possess a kind of potent power which is not always kept in check, and it is best to remain in their favor.

A third function embodies the concepts of fertility and sustenance, embracing the herder-cultivators or “common” people, i.e., the Indic Vaisyas. Concerns at this level include the fertility of humans, animals and land, and the well-being of the people. While ranked below the first and second strata, the third is the level upon which the other two depend for their existence. It is the herders and cultivators who feed and clothe the priests and warriors, and it is their labor which provides the surplus of goods necessary for the maintenance the class structure.

The divine representatives of the third function also tend to occur in pairs, but usually as twins (e.g., the Greek Dioscuri, the Vedic Ásvins) or close relatives. The Norse pair, Njörð and Freyr, are thought to be father and son. They are intimately associated with horses (the Indic Ásvins, "horsemen," or Nasatyas), and they are accompanied by a goddess who is either a sister or wife of one of them. The Indic Ásvins, for example, are tied to the goddess Sarasvati, the Greeks Castor and Pollux to Helen, and the Norse Njörð and Freyr to Freya. The Roman case provides an exception, where the god Quirinus stands alone as the divine ambassador of the third function. (Mallory, p. 132)

Either the tripartite division of society is reflected in its cosmology, or the ideology is dictating the social structure. It is a chicken-and-egg riddle; perhaps the best guess is that reality shapes the myth, and then the myth perpetuates the reality. In India, the modern caste system was preceded by a classificatory scheme dating back at least to Vedic times. While it is true that the Indic scheme is divided into four classifications, it is clearly conceived of as a system of three-plus-one. While the first three classes are deemed "*arya-*," the *sudras* are "*an-ärya -*," "non-Aryan," or simply, "others." The *sudras*, held to be outsiders, are not fully integrated into the society of the Aryans. Thus Vedic society "proper" is divided into *Brahman* intellectuals (*bráhman-* originally meant "effective verbal construct," "formula," or "prayer"), *Ksatriya* warrior-administrators (*ksatrám* meaning "rule," or "dominion"), and *Vaisya* workers (*vis-* designating the "[tribal] village," and *vésa-* meaning "household"). (Puhvel, p. 45)

Citing the fact that the Sanskrit term for "caste," "*várna-*," means "color," it has been suggested that the phrase "*an-ärya*," or "non-Aryan," refers to the darker-skinned Dravidians, who are thought by some to have been the indigenous population of the Indian subcontinent. Such arguments fail to consider the possibility that the word may not have been intended quite as literally as it has been taken. In a society rich in ritual and symbolism, a literal interpretation may be misdirected. Colors themselves have symbolic value, and have traditionally been associated with social status. Thus, communists were once "Reds," while American liberals were "Pinkos." Green is commonly associated with nature (third function), red with blood (second function), and white with purity (first function); witness the flags of countries as diverse as Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Iran, India and Ireland. Perhaps the

word *várna*- was meant to be understood in this context, as the three “colors” of Aryan society.

The Norse Lay of Ríg, or *Rigspula*, provides solid evidence for the social tripartition of ancient Scandinavia . It recounts the ancestral tale of the god Ríg (also known as Heimdallr), who fathers three sons by three different mothers. These three men in turn come to father three types of people. The first son, Thrall, is born with dark hair, a dark complexion and dull eyes. His nasty nails, gnarled knuckles, thick fingers and ugly face do not prevent him from finding a wife, Thír (“Drudge”), and fathering a brood of dullards with names such as Bastard, Paunch, Stumpy, Stinker and Lout. These are the ancestors of the “race of Thralls,” or slaves. (Hollander, p. 122)

Karl, the second son, is born with a ruddy complexion and swift eyes. A builder and a farmer, the hard-working Karl marries Snœr (“Daughter-in-Law”).

In their homestead, happy,	they had a brood,
hight Man and Yeoman,	Master, Goodman,
Husbandman, Farmer	Franklin, Crofter,
Bound-Beard, Steep-Beard	Broad, Swain, and Smith.
By other names	were known their daughters:
Woman, Gentlewoman,	Wife, Bride, Lady,
Haughty, Maiden,	Hussif and Dame:
thence are come	the kin of carls.

(Hollander, p. 124)

Earl is born last. He is blond and fair of skin, and his blazing eyes are a mark of nobility. Only he is of high enough birth to merit any further attention from his father,

Rig, who returns to teach him the runes and take him as an heir. Earl becomes a great warrior and a generous sovereign, and the father of many children including Boy, Bairn, Heir, Squire, Son and Scion. (Hollander, p. 127)

While Vedic lore describes priests, warriors and cultivators, Eddic lore speaks of nobles, freemen and slaves. Class in both traditions was ascribed at birth, but the Norse system was far more fluid. Priests could be either nobles or freemen, and even slaves could be warriors. The emphasis seems to have shifted away from function to status. The comparativist Jaan Puhvel relates these shifts in ideology to shifts in phonology. He explains that the Germanic languages are, on the whole,

"subject to wholesale yet systematic and structured slippage in phonology (the so-called sound shifts that made English *father* out of **pater*) and extreme stylization in verbal morphology (with “principal parts” like *sing, sang, sung*)." (Puhvel, p. 191)

He suggests that the entire mythos, having been constructed at some earlier time, has undergone a sort of transposition. Just as morphemes undergo slippage and shifting, so do mythos, ideology and social structure. With the loss of the priestly class among the Germans, the tripartite social system seems to have “slipped a notch.” Puhvel continues,

"Caesar noted (*De bello Gallico* 6. 21. 1, 6. 22. 1) that the Germans had no equivalent to druids and cared little for ritual. Hence, instead of priests, warriors and peasants, early Germanic legal sources speak of *nobiles, ingenui, serviles*, thus aristocrats, freemen and slaves, more like a decapitated Vedic system (minus the Brahman) of *rājanya, vaisya*, and *sudra*." (Puhvel, p. 191)

Despite the general pre-eminence of the priestly class, kingship is usually associated with the warrior class. In India, the king (*raja*) was of the *Ksatriya* caste, while the Germanic king's reputation was staked almost entirely on his success in battle. As warriors invade and become kings over the land, warrior divinities become kings of the gods. But while Indra, king of the Indic gods, was conceived specifically to be the champion of the gods (a *soma*-intoxicated *bersirk*, as it were), Óðinn, king of the Norse gods, is a different type of warrior. He is more General than Infantryman, directing the operations by the guidance of his shamanic vision. This requires further elaboration.

Among the Vikings, war was a constant theme. A reading of *Hávamál* reveals the prevailing philosophy that fame was all-important. Nothing was more ignoble than dying without renown, and death itself was scorned:

"Deyr fé en orðstír

deyja frændr deyraldre

deyr sjalfr it sama hveim er sér góðan getr.

Cattle die, kinsmen die, oneself dies the same; but fame alone will never die for him who gains a good one'." (Einarsson, p. 32)

Men desired most of all to earn fame through bravery and conquest. They cared little about death, and thought little about killing even a friend when vengeance was called for. Such a murder could be forgiven by the payment of *Wergild*, a sum regarded by the victim's family as equivalent to his worth. This practice is also seen in Vedic society, where Wergeld was paid in proportion to the victim's status (Tyler, p. 50).

As the desire for fame grew eventually to achieve the status of *raison d'être*, the Norse warriors sought access to the magico-religious. If one is to be continually successful in battle, one must then acquire divine and magical power. A magical sword such as Sigurd's, a runic spell, the assistance of a Valkyrie -- all are to be sought after and plentiful in the lore. The rage of the *bersirkir*, too, is divine, and sacred to Óðinn.

Óðinn himself, already a warrior, becomes a shaman, too. An extremely complex god, he is an administrator- warrior; he does not personally experience the rage of the *bersirk* so much as he imparts it to others. Cunning and wise, he is not a fighter but a devious and manipulative magician, an “orchestrator of conflict rather than a combatant” (Puhvel, p. 193). Warrior-king of the gods despite his lack of participation in battle, he gains shamanic wisdom by voluntarily undertaking a personal ordeal. Sacrificing himself to himself, he hangs himself, wounded, upon the world-tree Yggdrasil for nine nights until the secrets of the runes come to him. (*Hávamál*, st. 138)

Among the Norse, the first two functions of priest and warrior appear to have merged. Visionary fighters and magical heroes were likely more valuable to them than the maintenance of a separate class of religious practitioners, so the categories were integrated. The result is a redefined tripartite hierarchy which has opened up its classification to include bondsmen and slaves.

India	priests	<i>brahmanas</i>
	warriors	<i>ksatriyas</i>
	herder/cultivators	<i>vaisyas</i>
	outcasts	<i>sudras</i>
Iran	priests	<i>athravan-</i>
	warriors	<i>rathaestar-</i>
	herder/cultivators	<i>vastriyo/fsuyant-</i>
Rome	priests	<i>flamines</i>
	warriors	<i>milites</i>
	herder/cultivators	<i>quirites</i>

Gaul	priests	<i>druides</i>
	warriors	<i>equites</i>
	herder/cultivators	<i>plebes</i>
Iceland	priest/warriors	<i>Jarlar</i>
	herders/cultivators	<i>Karlar</i>
	bondsmen/slaves	<i>Thrallar</i>

(Mallory, p. 131) with additions.

Combined evidence strongly indicates that the ancient Indo-Europeans had a unified conceptualization of human society as being properly composed of three classes: priests, warriors, and herder-cultivators. Slaves have probably always been part of the reality, but as they were usually taken from enemy populations, they were easy to dismiss as outsiders to the classificatory scheme. Perhaps when two of the Norse categories merged, they were recruited into the scheme to maintain the tripartition. Perhaps this tripartition came as naturally to the Norse as it does to us, and their social structure did not feel solid without it.

Georges Dumézil has argued that early evidence for the tripartition of Indo-European society can be found in a treaty between Matiwaza, King of Mitanni, and the king of the Hittites. Dating to about 1380 BCE, the agreement invokes the Indic gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the Nasatyas. According to Dumézil, the first two names usually occur paired in the Vedas, as “Mitra-Varuna.” They represent, as discussed above, the two distinct aspects of sovereignty encompassed by the first function; while Mitra handles matters between humans, Varuna concerns himself with the magico-religious, attending to covenants with and between the gods. Indra, the warrior-god,

represents the second function, while the Nasatyas, divine twins who are associated closely with horses, livestock and people, represent the third. (Mallory, p. 131)

This tripartite conception of the order of human society has served as a lens through which the Indo-Europeans have viewed the world. Consequently there are repeated instances of tripartition in the mythology, and the number three itself appears with great frequency. Even today people speak of three fates, three tenses (past, present, and future) and three bears. A sentence such as the previous one does not feel complete if it does not contain three examples.

One recurring theme in Indo-European mythology is the “three sins of the warrior,” wherein the warrior figure commits an offense against each of the three functions, including the one he represents. In opposition to the first function, the warrior will defy or cause harm to come to his sovereign. In opposition to the second function, of which he is sovereign, he will display either cowardice or dishonor, thusly discrediting and disgracing himself. Finally, he will commit an assault, usually sexual, against a representative of the third function. (C. Scott Littleton, in his introduction to Dumézil, p. xi)

Indra is the classic “triple sinner.” His first offense is the slaying of Trisiras, the triple-headed dragon son of the Brahman god Tvashtar; the murder of a Brahman by a warrior is an offense against the first function. Later, when the demon Vrtra threatens to overpower Indra, the god sues the beast for peace. He then breaks the truce and murders him. By doing so, Indra acts in opposition to two functions: breaking a covenant works against the first function, while Indra’s cowardice in the beginning and unwarranted force in the end oppose the warrior principle, or second function. Stripping himself of his last shred of dignity, he acts in opposition to the third function when he disguises himself as the husband of a beautiful woman and has sex with her.

While a ready parallel exists in the offenses of Herakles, one must stretch considerably in the search for a Norse example. Winn Shan offers the tale of Starkad, as told in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus and the Icelandic *Gautreks Saga*. Both sources are exceedingly late and the theme seems to have undergone substantial reconfiguration, if indeed it is related at all. While the hero does commit three offenses, they appear to be unrelated to the three Dumézilian functions. They are, as was Norse society, more concerned with treachery and

cowardice. (Winn, p. 197) The original theme, an expression of the ambiguities inherent in the warrior role, is not found intact among the Norse, perhaps because the Vikings saw no such ambiguity.

The number three makes appearances when Indra slays a three-headed monster, and when the Norse *Æsir* attempt to burn their nemesis three times but she is “thrice reborn” (*Voluspá* st. 21, Hollander). Indra’s faithful ally, Vishnu, is often referred to as “three-stepper” or “wide-strider” in the *Rig Veda*. The name recalls his primordial deed of propping apart the Universe with three strides, thereby creating the two-part dwelling of both gods and mortals.

"Let me now sing the heroic deeds of Visnu, who has measured apart the realms of the earth, who propped up the upper dwelling-place, striding far as he stepped forth three times. They praise for his heroic deeds Visnu who lurks in the mountains, wandering like a ferocious wild beast, in whose three wide strides all creatures dwell." (*Rig Veda* I. 154. 1-2) (O’Flaherty, p. 226)

The Norse god Viðarr provides an interesting parallel; his very name contains the exhortation ‘Wider!’ (Puhvel, p. 56) At Ragnarök it is he who will stride forward to defeat the wolf Fenrir by planting one foot on his lower jaw and then ripping his mouth open. It is characteristic of Norse mythology that this great and defining deed occurs in an eschatological context, as is the case with Þórr’s slaying of the Miðgarð serpent. The Indic episode, by contrast, is an act of creation. (Puhvel, p. 204)

The number three is also of significance to what J. P. Mallory has called “The Threefold Death” of the Celts and Germans. Among these peoples, evidence has shown that human beings were sacrificed or executed in one of three ways, each being representative of one of the three Dumézilian functions:

"The ancient Gauls, for example, made offerings to three gods -- Esus, Taranis and Teutates -- by recourse to hanging, burning and drowning, respectively. This pattern is replicated in the pagan Germanic punishments of hanging, stabbing and drowning, each technique correlated to the crime for which the victim was convicted." (Mallory, p. 139)

It appears that hanging was the appropriate punishment for a violation of the first function, while stabbing and drowning are associated with the second and third functions, respectively. Drowning in general has sometimes been construed to indicate a sacrifice to "Mother Earth," as opposed to "Father Sky."

This apparently omnipresent tripartite ideology actually functions within a dualistic framework, as Dumézil and his colleagues were quick to point out (Mallory, p. 140). Both the first and third functions are typically expressed through a pair of gods, and the underlying theme of all of it seems to be a battle between good and evil, or darkness and light. This dualistic undertow is reflected in a mythological "War of the Functions" which pits the representatives of the first two functions against those of the third, thus reducing the three strata to two, and finally to one. As Michael and his angels battle Satan and his cohorts in the Biblical *Revelation*, so too battle the *Suras* and *Asuras* in the *Rig-Veda*, and the *Æsir* and *Vanir* in the *Eddas*. Theosophist Elsa Brita Titchenell suggests that the two sides of the duality "belong to different levels of existence, one superior to the other; they may also parallel the Hindu *kumāras* (Skt. virgins) and *agnisvāttas* (those who have tasted of fire), respectively gods who remain unmanifest and those who have embodied immaterial worlds." (Titchenell, p. 42)

The Norse "War of the *Æsir* and *Vanir*" begins with an unsuccessful murder attempt and ends with an exchange of hostages. The Vanic gods Njörð, Freyr and Freya go to *Asgarður* live among the *Æsir* and in return, the *Vanir* are sent Mímir, whom they promptly behead, and Hœnir (Hollander, p. 9). Unfazed, Óðinn makes priests of the three *Vanir* and the gods are unified.

The Indic version of the divine “War of the Functions” has as its cause Indra’s contempt for the Nasatyas, also known as the Ásvins, whom he holds to be unworthy of receiving the *soma* sacrifice. *Soma* is particularly important to Indra because it is the beverage which enables him to defeat Vrtra and become king of the gods. As healers of the people, the Asvins are polluted by their contact with humans. Such intimate involvement in the affairs of mortals is enough to earn Indra’s disdain and foment his reluctance to share any offering of the sacrificial beverage.

The priest Cyavana challenges Indra by invoking the Asvins during a performance of the *soma* ritual. Indra responds angrily by attempting to launch a thunderbolt at him, only to find that his arm has been stayed by the mighty seer. Cyavana then produces the powerful *Asura*, or demon, *Mada* (“Drunkenness, Intoxication”), whose gigantic mouth threatens to swallow up Indra whole. Overcome with fear, Indra is coerced into admitting the Asvins and peace is made (Winn, p. 67; Puhvel, p. 61).

The creation of *Mada* is reminiscent of the Norse figure *Kvasir*. In the *Skáldskaparmál* of the *Snorra Edda*, a truce is effected between gods when the two parties spit into a crock. Óðinn saves the stuff and fashions out of it the wise man, *Kvasir*, who is killed by dwarfs. Mixing his blood with honey, they produce the mead of poetry. In India, *Mada* is the monster that forces the resolution of the conflict, whereas in Iceland, *Kvasir*, in a manner of speaking, seals the bargain. Puhvel points out that in India, alcohol came to have negative connotations, whereas in Iceland, those who partook of the sacred mead of poetry were granted wisdom and poetic power. (Puhvel, p. 210)

The Indo-European “War of the Functions” may have served, among other things, as a reminder to the lowest stratum of society that they were to be subservient to both priests and warriors, a “situation divinely chartered by a mythical war which their ancestors lost” (Mallory, p. 139). It may be an expression of the oft-stated culture versus nature dichotomy; while the first and second functions are concerned expressly with the individual acting in society, the third is occupied primarily with the natural rhythms of life. Some have even argued that the war represents actual battles that occurred in the ancient past between migrating populations and the peoples they encountered. None of these hypotheses can be substantiated.

In addition to commonalities of structure, Indo-European mythology displays some regularity in personage. While some deities can be recognized by their names alone, as in the previously mentioned case of the “Sky-Father,” others can only be identified by the pattern of interest they display in the affairs of humans. In general, the similarity between Pórr and Indra is striking, but there are of course differences. Indra has much wider scope as a warrior deity than does Pórr; much of the role that Indra plays in Indic mythology is relegated to Óðinn in the Norse conception.

Rig Veda Book 10, Hymn 153

- 1 Swaying about, the Active Ones came nigh to Indra at his birth,
And shared his great heroic might.
- 2 Based upon strength and victory and power, O Indra is thy birth:
Thou, Mighty One, art strong indeed.
- 3 Thou art the Vritra-slayer, thou, Indra, hast spread the firmament:
Thou hast with might upheld the heavens.
- 4 Thou, Indra, bearest in thine arms the lighting that accords with thee,
Whetting thy thunderbolt with might.
- 5 Thou, Indra, art preeminent over all creatures in thy might:
Thou hast pervaded every place.

(Griffith, vol. II, p. 593)

Indra is “the great macho deity of the Vedic pantheon;” he is *sahásramuska*, or “thousand-testicled” (Puhvel, p.50). Likened often to a rutting bull, he prepares for his most important deed by getting rip-roaring drunk. Puhvel calls Indra the “action-god,” sort of a celestial Schwartzenegger. He is “a dragon killer of enormous appetites who shades over into a storm-god with a thunder weapon (*vájra*-).” (*Ibid.*) Heartened by the psychotropic *soma*, he slays a monstrous adversary, the creature named *Vrtra*. As a god of rain, his foe is characterized as a “demon of drought who

needs to be vanquished in order to make the rains (and hence the rivers) flow.”
(Puhvel, p. 51)

In the Norse conception, it is Þórr who wields the thunderbolt. Like Indra, he is a warrior/storm god and a slayer of demons.

Comes then Mjolnir's mighty weilder;
gapes the grisly earth-girdling serpent
when strides forth Thór to stay the Worm.

Mightily mauls Mithgarth's warder --
shall all wights in the world wander from home -- ;
back falls nine steps Fjorgyn's offspring --
nor fears for his fame -- from the frightful worm.

(*Voluspá*, st. 54 - 55) (Hollander, p. 11)

His appetite, as substantial as Indra's, has been demonstrated on at least one occasion:

Hverjan létu höfpi skemra	Each one left they less by a head,
auk á seyði sípan báru:	and laid them soon on the seething fire
át Sifjar verr, áþr sofa gengi,	then ere he slumbered, the Thunderer
ate,	
einn með öllu yxn tvá Hymis.	himself alone, of the oxen, twain.

Visnu, another Indic Ksatriya god, having himself slain a multitude of demons, can also be said to resemble Þórr in some respects. (Puhvel, p. 204)

While Óðinn is compared most often to Varuna in his role as mystical sovereign, the Indic god with whom he has the most in common is probably Rudra-Siva, who achieved prominence after the *Rig Veda* was composed. Both gods are unpredictable, dangerous and morally ambivalent, even evil. Both accept human sacrifices, both possess arcane magical knowledge, and both enjoy wandering about in disguise. Interestingly, while Óðinn is one-eyed, Rudra has three; both are manifestations of the concept of god as visionary. (Puhvel, p. 200)

Resting now on the assumption that the comparativist dogma has been sufficiently demonstrated, it remains to examine the historical and archaeological context of the texts. By this it is hoped that a temporal relationship between the two can be established, and a hypothesis proffered as to their degree of relatedness.

PART II -- History and Archaeology

1. Indus Valley Civilization

The comparative mythologist Max Müller set a date for the creation of the *Rig Veda* at around 1500 BCE, proposing a span of about five hundred years to allow for the creation of the three succeeding Vedic works. Subsequent scholars came to take his date for fact despite its speculative basis, and there is reason to believe that Müller was himself using Biblical chronology (Frawley).

Known as the *Samhitas*, the four Vedic texts are the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Atharva Veda*, and the *Yajur Veda*. The *Rig Veda* was written by people who referred to themselves as *Aryan*. According to Müller, the Aryans brought the *Rig Veda* with them into India, where the three others were composed within half a millennium. Tied by Müller's date to somewhere between 1700 and 1200 BCE, the Aryans are said to have invaded the cities of India on horseback and overrun the native population.

Sometime after the completion of the *Vedas*, further additions were made to the theological corpus. They include the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas*, or “forest books,” which were appended to the *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanisads*. These works, which take the form of elaborations, explanations and contemplations, are believed to represent the cycle of Aryan influence and native adjustment. According to anthropologist Stephen A. Tyler, each was composed during a distinct phase of the Aryan occupation, and “each reflects the facets of the process of Aryan/non-Aryan interaction and synthesis.” (Tyler, p. 43) Taken together, these texts are the primary source of information on ancient Indic civilization.

Archaeologists have traditionally looked to the Indus Valley for the beginnings of civilization in India . Primary among the sites revealed there have been the urban ruins of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro . When these turned out to predate the *Vedas*, they were deemed pre-Aryan. Surrounded, in some cases, by walls, they are said to be the ancient forts that are mentioned in the texts.

While the *Rig Veda* dates itself to some time preceding these occupations, archaeologists have remained skeptical. The “father” of subcontinental archaeology, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, was one of the first to suggest that the abandoned cities of the Harappans are referred to in the *Rig Veda*, where Indra is hailed as a “fort-destroyer.”

He boldly cast down forts which none had e’er assailed: unwearied he
destroyed the godless treasure-stores.

Like Sun and Moon he took the stronghold’s wealth away , and, praised in
song, demolished foes with flashing dart.

(*Rig Veda*, X. 138. 4) (Griffith, vol II, p. 584)

The walled citadels of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro , unique in subcontinental archaeology, were to Wheeler, rather like forts. They were certainly the only real possibility as yet uncovered (Fairservis, p. 310).

The tale of the Aryan invasion also approaches dogma. The Aryans, semi-nomadic pastoralists and fierce warriors, are said to have rained down upon the fortified

cities of the Indus in their horse-drawn chariots, bringing their gods and their language with them. Illiterate barbarians, they were organized into classes and led by warrior chiefs who staked their reputations upon wealth, as measured in herds, as well as prowess in battle. Breeding cattle, sheep, and goats and speaking an Indo-European tongue, they sound suspiciously like the Norsemen. The Aryans eventually ran off the indigenous population, who are assumed to be related to the non-Indo-European-speaking Dravidians of southern India .

The Indus civilization is represented primarily by the sites of Harappa, Lothal, and Mohenjo-Daro . The site at Harappa , for which the entire cultural horizon is named, contains a great walled platform with a group of buildings to its north. Laid out in two lines of seven buildings each, they appear to be “a series of well-planned houses probably once surrounded by a compound wall.” (Fairervis, p. 253) The measurements are regular, and the conformity is almost military. Now quite far from the river, there is evidence to indicate that the Indus once flowed some six miles closer to the site than it does at the present time. (Fairervis, p. 251)

Lothal, located just above sea-level, shows evidence for a shifting river as well. While further away from the Indus Valley , the Sabarmati River or one of its branches has shifted course around the site at least twice. (Fairervis, p. 267) One researcher, S. R. Rao, has suggested that “fire worship” was practiced there. Artifacts found, as well as the plan of the town help to locate it within the Harappan tradition (Fairervis, p. 293). The archaeologist Walter Fairervis counted an additional eighty-five sites that appeared to fit the profile.

The site at Mohenjo-Daro contains an artificial mound about forty feet high in the west and a lower, broader area to the east. (Fairervis, p. 242) There is a large sandy area somewhat central to the main site, indicating that these lowlands were susceptible to floods, for which there is abundant evidence. (Fairervis, p. 243) Large walls of fired brick and raised platforms at both this site and Harappa may have been part of a strategy for coping with periodic flooding. (Fairervis, p. 304) There are no fewer than nine building periods at Mohenjo-Daro , likely to have been efforts at reconstructing the city after substantial floods. The more the population grew, the more vulnerable it was to the unpredictability of the Indus , which could drown a crop in moments. The decline of the city may have been due, in part, to a

shortage of food as the agriculturalists struggled to keep up with the needs of the population despite the whims of the river. (Fairservis, p. 306)

Of the many layers of occupation at Mohenjo-Daro , it is one of the last that has lead to some rather substantial conclusions. In the Late Harappan the occupation appears to deteriorate, and the buildings of the earlier period have been either destroyed or covered over with “hundreds of miserable huts” (Fairservis, p. 303). The skeletons of men, women, and children, apparently murdered, have been unearthed, fueling speculation. Scholars have read civil disorder and outside raiding into this evidence, thus confirming for themselves a bloody end to the final phase of occupation. (Fairservis, p. 303) Here, they say, is proof for the Aryan invasion of India .

Archaeologists have divided the Harappan civilization into three main phases, with many subphases. The earliest layers of the occupation are under groundwater and therefore inaccessible; were they to be excavated, they would form the basis of the presently hypothetical *Early Harappan*. Mohenjo-Daro is taken to be a *Mature Harappan* site, being the most comprehensive record of the society to date. Later, less complex layers signal the deterioration identified with the *Late Harappan*. At this point there appear in the archaeological record traits considered by some to be foreign and associated with cultures such as the Jhukar. (Fairservis, p. 306) One researcher opines:

"The conspicuous absence of the perforated jar, goblet, beaker, jar with micaceous red slip and terracotta triangular ‘cake’ is the culmination of a process of gradual replacement of certain old forms by the newly-evolved ones. It may also indicate a change in food-habits and social customs." (Fairservis, p. 306, quoting S. R. Rao) [1]

The Harappan economy was based on agriculture and animal husbandry; domesticated animals included the humped bull, the domestic buffalo, goats, sheep,

pigs, dogs, cats, elephants, camels, horses, asses, and fowl (Tyler, p. 32). There was considerable craft specialization as well, and goods were transported up and down the rivers by experienced seafarers maintaining vast networks of trade. Pack caravans and ox carts were used to transport goods on dry land (Tyler, p. 32).

That there was a centralized authority is obvious in the meticulous planning of the cities, and the various elaborations of houses and material possessions attest to the differential access of a class system. (Fairservis, p. 299) There is some disagreement among scholars as to whether or not there was an established priesthood, but “ceremonial ablution, ritual purification, fire sacrifice, possibly ritual drinking, and the priestly offering of animals and humans are all suggested” (Fairservis, p. 301). The Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro, surrounded by a series of small rooms that have been interpreted as priests’ quarters, has provided much of the argument. Given the importance of ritual bathing in contemporary Indian society, the purpose of such a structure seems clear. Additionally, differences in male attire as displayed on pictorial artifacts have been construed to confirm the conclusion that there was a class of priests. (Tyler, p. 33)

Of perhaps the greatest significance among all Harappan artifacts are the numerous carved seals that have been recovered. Concentrated around Harappa, specimens have been found scattered across what were probably ancient routes of trade. Composed, in most cases, of steatite, they were likely used as a prehistoric kind of “designer label” to mark one’s property or wares. A number of seal impressions on clay have also survived; these are likely to have served as tags attached to bales of goods, for the reverse sides show traces of packing materials (Fairservis, p. 274).

Most of the seals are rectangular, depicting an animal or animals along with objects that are assumed to have ritual purposes. The characters, some of which appear to be pictographic, are usually found above the animal’s back and limited to only a few. The brevity of the text has led investigators to the afore-stated conclusion that the inscriptions are short words such as names and titles. There are approximately 400 known symbols and the writing is from right to left, but where there is a second line, it occurs in boustrophedon fashion. Many speculate that the system is syllabic (Fairservis, p. 278). Working on the assumption that the Harappans were not Indo-Aryan, that, indeed, they were probably related to the

Dravidians, the language expressed on the seals is thought to be non-Indo-European. It has remained undeciphered throughout the period of investigation.

Somehow, the Indus civilization died. Causes of death proposed have included flooding, nutrient-wasted land, climatological change, and barbarian invasion. Walter Fairservis has been willing to accept the flooding hypothesis to a limited degree. "One can tolerate just so much," he says, "and then, provided the promise of a better situation is there, one will move on." (Fairservis, p. 310) Stephen Tyler, however, has played the invasion card in the face of what he considers to be inadequate evidence for other alternatives. To him, the archaeological record speaks of persistence and survival. He is certain that only a large scale event such as repeated and terrible flooding over a number of seasons could have caused such a decline in the civilization, and he does not see evidence to support the idea. (Tyler, p. 36) He prefers, instead, to reiterate the Aryan Invasion Theory, which really cannot be stated any better:

"Lacking conclusive evidence of dramatic and catastrophic ecological changes, it seems reasonable to assume that the Indus civilization was destroyed by human agents. It is usual to identify these agents as barbarian hordes of Indo-European-speaking invaders known as Aryans. . . First, the Aryans are thought to have arrived in India at a date corresponding to the downfall of the Indus civilization (1500 - 1700 B.C.). Second, the sacred books of the Aryans record their conflict with indigenes occupying an area corresponding with that of the Indus civilization. These indigenes were rich in cattle and lived in fortified strongholds. In their hymns the Aryans proudly celebrated the destruction

of these strongholds and the expulsion of their dark-skinned inhabitants. . . . More probably the Indus civilization was gradually disrupted and eventually beaten down not only by the constant threat posed by the invaders but partially at the connivance of its own people. This at least would be in keeping with the facts of historical invasions of later times. The picture that emerges then is one of a constant and long drawn-out series of minor raids and confrontations, of a gradual loss of security and disruption of farming and trade, of the destruction of outlying agricultural villages, and finally of local segments of the population independently suing for peace with the barbarians. The end result was that the bonds of empire were weakened, the cities were cut off from reliable sources of food, until finally each in turn eventually succumbed." (Tyler, p. 37)

Tyler is actually more confused about the beginnings of Harappa than he is about its demise. Ever the evolutionist, he is troubled by the absence of an explanation for the birth of Harappa . He explains that the rise of cities has been shown to be, in other parts of the world, "a gradual process, proceeding step by step from the foundations of earlier nonurban agricultural societies. In India it has not yet been possible to discern the clear outlines of a similar process of evolutionary change." (Tyler, p. 35) The reader is free to wonder what the series of events was that lead the Aryan nonurban pastoralists to evolve their cities, quite a distance away, in fact, from the original scene of their triumph.

There were, of course, others besides the Harappans present in ancient India . The Jhukar culture, found on the same sites as the Indus culture, is dated much later. These people do not appear to have had a writing system, although round seals similar to the Harappan have been found. While they attempted to use Harappan building methods, they seem not to have mastered the techniques; this is demonstrated by irregular brick size and uneven walls. Researchers such as Tyler have concluded that the tradition is “continuous with that of the Indus civilization, but definitely degraded. Apparently the Jhukar people were the remnants of a population partially destroyed by invaders.” (Tyler, p. 35)

At later dates there is evidence of a wholly different tradition known as Jhangar. Identified primarily by their pottery, which is decidedly different from that of the Jhukar, their Gray-Black Ware is thought to be unconnected to preceding traditions. For Tyler , this creates an impression of the Jhangar as intruders circa 1000 BC. Where they are not present, the native traditions look as if they have undergone a phase of intergration and transformation, effected by a “series of waves of immigration from Iran in the second millennium.” (Tyler, p. 35)

The consensus of thought has been that the *Rig Veda*, the foundation of all subsequent manifestations of Indian society, was conceived by the barbarian invaders known as Aryans, the name by which they refer to themselves in the texts. The date given for their arrival in India varies between 1700 and 1200 BCE, at which time the lore was actually created. For while the gods may have been known prior to that time, it is the exploits of that era which are mythologized in the *Rig Veda*. The Aryans left the Indus cities of the Harappans abandoned and established their own way of life in India , eventually building their own cities around the Ganges . These people are the ancestors of contemporary Indian society.

2. Germania, Scandinavia and Iceland

As uncertain as the prehistory of India is, the prehistory of Scandinavia is even more dubious. For while it is possible to date findings, there is virtually no way to determine to whom most of them belonged. As stated earlier, the wanderings of tribes and languages are almost impossible to trace through archaeological means alone, and the written word did not really make an impact in these areas until the

Christian era. It is difficult to know therefore, not only with whom we are dealing, but from which tradition they come.

The last glaciation, lasting until about 13,000 BCE, did not free the whole of Scandinavia for occupation until around 7000 BCE. At that time, Denmark and Sweden were contiguous, so migration through to Norway could have occurred through those lands or by way of the Kola Peninsula in northern Russia. The oldest archaeological finds in this area, generally implements of bone, stone and antler, date to approximately 9000 to 8000 BCE.

Rock carvings dating to the Bronze Age depict sun dials, wheels, oxen and ships; seafaring was apparently quite important. No doubt it was related to trade, which was rather vast by that period. Bronze itself is an alloy of copper and tin, neither of which was produced in the region. There would have been no Bronze Age in Scandinavia were it not for trade. For its part, the North possessed amber, highly prized in Greece and Egypt, among other places. There is reason to believe that a trade network stretched from Denmark and the Baltic throughout southern Europe by a very early date. (Chantepie de la Saussaye, p. 55)

Iron came into use in Norway at around 500 BCE, and contact with the Roman Empire, beginning at the start of the first millennium of the Common Era, initiated the Roman Iron Age in Scandinavia. Under the pressure of large-scale Germanic migrations, this contact broke down *circa* 400 - 600 CE. Subsequent to that period the people of the North were in close contact with the Germanic peoples west and south of North Sea (Midgaard, p. 11). Scholars have generally assumed the inhabitants of Scandinavia to be Germanic, perhaps because the *Germani* were the northernmost people to be documented by the Romans. In any event, by the time the Viking age commenced *circa* 800 CE, the language spoken by the "Northmen" was a Germanic one.

Scant evidence of settlement has been found, due in part to the biodegradable nature of their buildings. Since the Scandinavians did not generally construct stone or brick buildings, we must look to their graves for information, which appear to have undergone considerable change over time. At present it is not known whether the single collective grave that has been discovered in Norway is representative of the Late Stone Age period, but it is clear that, during the Early Bronze Age, stone and

gravel mounds were constructed for dead chiefs (Midgaard, p. 11). Single burials, rich in gravegoods, have also been found which date to the period.

Cremation became preeminent during the Late Bronze Age, when urns were buried under small mounds. While the decrease in grave goods has been equated by some with a greater sense of spirituality and a less materialistic conception of the afterlife, it does not appear to be due to a radical reconceptualization. The change from burial to cremation seems to have come about slowly, since fire itself had long been part of the funeral rite. Burned grave goods have been recovered from Neolithic sites, including one cremation grave at Stenildgaard near Aars, which is "clearly exceptional" (Davidson 1967, p. 46). Single burials, too, have been found which indicate the burning of a fire inside the grave.

During the Roman Iron Age, both stone mounds and urn burials were made, and several runic monuments were erected. Tacitus informs us:

"There is no ostentation about their funerals. The only special observance is that the bodies of famous men are burned with particular kinds of wood. When they have heaped up the pyre they do not throw garments or spices on it; only the dead man's arms, and sometimes his horse too, are cast into the flames. The tomb is a raised mound of turf. They disdain to show honour by laboriously rearing high monuments of stone, which they think would only lie heavy on the dead." (Tacitus, p. 123)

The practice of cremation seems to have continued uninterrupted into the Migration period, at least among royals. After the body was burned, the bones were collected and washed. They were then placed in a simple vessel such as a clay urn or a wooden bucket and laid in a pit at the site of the funeral pyre. Stones were placed

over it to create a large cairn, which was then covered by a howe topped with turf. (Davidson 1967, p. 108)

Other burials indicate the extensive use of ritual sacrifice. Horses are the preferred animal, if the finds at Skedemosse on Öland are any indication. There, at a site covering the period from 400 to 500 CE, the bones of more than one hundred individual horses were uncovered. Horse sacrifice is also present in the Indic tradition, and if one interpretation of the name *Skedemosse* is correct, both cultures enjoyed horse-racing, too (Davidson 1967, p. 90). At Skedemosse the remains of fifty men, women, and children testify to the use of human sacrifice as well. They were accompanied in death by a substantial number of grave goods including gold rings, swords, spear-heads, arrows, axes, belt fittings, beads and combs. (Todd, p. 194)

Human sacrifices were also common during the Viking period. Adam of Bremen, writing around 1070, tells us:

"There is also a festival at Uppsala every nine years, common to all the provinces of Sweden . Attendance at this event is compulsory and it is the universal practice for kings and peoples and everyone to send offerings to Uppsala and -- a cruel thing -- those who have become Christians may secure exemption on payment of a fine. The sacrifice on this occasion involves the slaughter of nine males of every creature, with whose blood the gods are placated. The bodies are hung in a grove near the temple, a sanctuary so holy that each tree is regarded as itself divine, in consequence of the death and decay of the victims. Dogs and horses hang there beside human beings, and

a Christian has told me that he has seen as many as seventy-two carcasses hanging there side by side." (Brøndsted, p. 285)

Additionally, H. R. Ellis Davidson has discussed a "tradition of suttee" associated with the cult of Óðinn. If a wife wished to join her deceased husband in the realm of the gods, she would be ritually strangled and her body burned (Davidson, 1964, p. 157). Nanna, wife of the Norse god Baldr, leapt into his funeral pyre, just as a pre-modern Hindu widow would have. Nanna, however, was acting out of grief, while the Hindu practice was virtually mandated by *karmic* constraints.

Hundreds of graves have been found which date to the Viking period. They reveal a great range of practices and, apparently, a corresponding variety of beliefs. Both cremation and burial occur, with burial taking place in "large wooden chambers, sometimes in modest coffins; in a big longship or in a little boat, or sometimes in a symbolical [sic] boat made of stones or in a carriage." (Brøndsted, p. 289) Most striking are the three ship burials that have been unearthed which date to the first part of the Viking age, *circa* 800 - 900 CE. Contained within large mounds, they were presumably only for royals and chiefs. (Midgaard, p. 12)

There is no evidence for any real consistency in funerary practices during the Viking era, except perhaps within communities. At Lindholm Høje in northern Jutland, a large Viking cemetery has been found which dates from between 650 and 1000 CE. Most of the 700 graves that have been unearthed there are cremation graves, and while only some are surrounded by stones, they are all alike in their method of deposition.

"The burning of the bodies had evidently not taken place in the actual graveyard, but elsewhere, in a place still unknown to us, and the grave-goods -- such as ornaments, glass beads, knives, spindles, whetstones, wooden boxes, draughtsmen, a dog, a sheep, and (more rarely) a horse or a cow -- had been

burned with the bodies. The ashes from the funeral pyre are taken to the cemetery, spread on a piece of ground about a yard across (a 'cremation-spot'), and covered with a thin layer of earth. A sacrificial vessel might be placed on top of the graves." (Brøndsted, p. 295, quoting Th. Ramskou)

Johannes Brøndsted has suggested that there were numerous factors involved in determining the rites that would be performed, including the wealth and status of the deceased, the customs of the local community, and the relative influence of Christian versus pagan traditions in the area. (Brøndsted, p. 290)

While actual funerary practices were varied, there was more consistency in Viking attitudes after burial. Each family was responsible for its own members, from the disposition of the body to the preservation of the site. The dead, it was believed, remained with the family, acting as either benevolent or malevolent spirits, depending on the mood of the moment. An angry ghost (a "walker-after- death") was "terrible and dangerous, and the only course open to the relatives would be to break open his grave and kill him a second time. A. W. Brøgger believes that many of the grave entries which archaeologists have noted may be explained in this way: they were not always mere looting." (Brøndsted, p. 291)

The first historical contact with the Germanic peoples of northern Europe was made by the ancient Romans. Along the northern borders of their empire they encountered the southern *Germani*, a group of tribes who spoke several different dialects of the same language. Organized as small kingdoms with some degree of class division, the *Germani* were uninfluenced by classical Mediterranean culture. They had no written literature despite the possession of a runic alphabet, which appears to have been used only for inscriptions. (Kristjánsson, p. 7) The Scandinavians themselves do not appear in written sources until shortly before 800 CE, and these are in Latin. (Kristjánsson, p. 9).

It is the Roman Cornelius Tacitus who provides us with the earliest accessible documentation of the *Germani* in 98 CE. Even though his account may be accurate,

as far as it goes, it is uncertain whether or not it applies "to the Scandinavians who lived around the Baltic, far from the homeland of the Romans." (Kristjánsson, p. 7) The *Germani* are, by this time, securely invested in the ideology of war. The quest for fame, so evident in the Eddas of more than a millennium later, is already a guiding principle.

"Many noble youths, if the land of their birth is stagnating in a long period of peace and inactivity, deliberately seek out other tribes which have some war in hand. For the Germans have no taste for peace; renown is more easily won among perils, and a large body of retainers cannot be kept together except by means of violence and war." (Tacitus, p. 113)

The material culture of the *Germani* can be traced back to about the fifth century BCE and the beginnings of the northern Iron Age. At this time there appear to be at least three distinctive culture-provinces: the Face-urn culture (*Gesichtsurnenkultur*) in Pomerania, the Jastorf culture in northern Germany and Denmark, and the Harpstedt culture in the north-west. These three groups were probably the foundation for the loose ethnic association that later came to be called "German."

"But the details are denied to us and it must not be assumed that the peoples of northern Europe were conscious of any ethnic or cultural unity in the middle of the first millennium B.C., any more than they were in the time of Julius Caesar or Charlemagne.

‘German,’ it will be well to remember, was a term applied to the barbarians beyond the Rhine by the

Romans. It was never, so far as we know, applied by the early Germans to themselves." (Todd, p. 21)

History is dominated by the Romans until the fourth and fifth centuries of the Common Era, when the Germanic Migrations took place and the Germanic tribes conquered the western regions of the Roman Empire . While the Romans lost political control, classical culture continued with only limited Germanicization. The Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Burgundians, Vandals, and Franks simply took up rule in their new lands along the very lines that the Romans had established. In Italy and western Europe, the conquering Germans were apparently absorbed into the local populations. Only a small area of the northern part of the Empire made the shift to Germanic languages, and while Germanic loan words do occur (approximately 300 into French), no Romance language "shows significant influence on phonetics or syntax."(Brøndsted, p. 11).

In the sixth century the Byzantine Emperor Justinian reconquered large areas of the old Western Roman Empire . The Germanic Lombards responded by crossing the Alps to northern Italy but they, too, were Romanized in time. In the seventh century the Arabs became the primary threat to the stability of Europe, taking Syria , Jerusalem , and Egypt away from the Byzantines. By 712 they had taken Spain as well, to be followed by Sicily , southern Italy and the southern coast of France . Unlike the Germans, the Arabs were not readily absorbed into the societies of those they conquered. Theirs was a religious war of intolerance, and the subjugated had little choice but to accept the religion and language of their conquerors (Brøndsted, p. 14).

France , isolated and alone, was cut off from most of her trade. In response she experienced both an economic shift from commerce to agriculture and a political shift from the Merovingian dynasty of the 6th and 7th centuries to the Carolingian of the 8th and 9th (Brøndsted, p. 15). Free of Viking raids during the lifetime of Charlemagne , France nonetheless fell victim shortly after his death. Nearly a century of poor relations with Denmark took their toll.

During the Viking era, Danes, Norwegians and Swedes sought their fame through terrible raids on most of northwestern Europe . The Danes established control of north-eastern England at East Anglia and Northumbria , ruling under a system

known as the Danelaw. Norwegians conquered Ireland , establishing a rule that lasted for most of the 10th and 11th centuries. In France , Rouen eventually fell to the Vikings and the state of Normandy was established. The most famous Duke of Normandy was William the Conqueror, who became sovereign over the whole of England after the Battle of Hastings in 1066. (Kristjánsson, p. 10).

According to *Landnámabók* (the “Book of Settlements”), most of the settlers to Iceland came from the western provinces of Norway . The laws they composed were based on the Law of Gula, which was then valid in Hordaland, Sogn and Fjordane; Icelandic is most closely related to the dialects of Norwegian that were spoken in these districts. (Kristjánsson, p. 16) While no Icelandic literature was written down before the twelfth century, an oral tradition has maintained a reasonable account of the settlement of the country.

"We are told that Iceland was discovered by Norse Vikings sometime near the middle of the ninth century, that the first settler, Ingólfr Arnarson from Firðir in West Norway , settled in Reykjarvík (now Reykjavík) in the year 874. Within the next sixty years the country was almost completely settled by Norsemen who came in part directly from Norway , in part after having spent some time in the Norse settlements of the British Isles: Shetland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, the western shores of England (Lancastershire) and Scotland , and the east coast of Ireland ." (Einarsson, p. 3)

We are also told that the main reason for the settlement was political. Toward the end of the ninth century, the Norwegian King Haraldr inn hárfagri (the Fairhaired) was attempting to consolidate rule over the many petty kingdoms of Norway . He was successful in unifying his country, but many of its inhabitants had chosen to

leave rather than assent to what they considered to be his tyranny. These settlers were heathen, and they remained so until the conversion of Iceland in the year 1000.

The conversion of Iceland to Christianity was established by an act of the Althing, the Icelandic "Parliament." After heated debate, the leaders ruled that all Icelanders were to be baptized, but that they could continue to sacrifice to the old gods in private. It was a strategic move along the path of least resistance. By voluntarily adopting Christianity, the old *goðar* were able to maintain control over the new religion while the country reaped the benefits of expanded trade in a peacetime environment. Most crucially, the Church taught the *goðar* and their sons to read and write in Icelandic, providing the impetus for a literary revolution in the vernacular. It is this chain of events that allowed the Old Icelandic Eddas, sagas, and skaldic poetry to be immortalized in writing (Einarsson, p. 11).

Old Icelandic literature has been roughly divided into two categories: the Eddic poems, or "*eddukvæði*," and the skaldic poems, or "*dróttkvæði*." Both types originate in Norway, although the Eddic poems may have roots that lie further south. While the bulk of them are Icelandic, the oldest poems are thought to come from Norway. The Eddic poems, however, survived only in Iceland. (Kristjánsson, p. 23)

It is important to note that the Eddic poems were not collected in a written form until at least two centuries after the conversion of Iceland to Christianity. The intervening period was, or was supposed to be, hostile to such heresies (Kristjánsson, p. 27). When the documents were finally produced, they disappeared entirely from the historic record for a period of approximately four hundred years. Therefore it is not surprising that the surviving literature is, at times, somewhat confused.

In 1643, Brynjolf Sveinsson, then the Bishop of Skalholt in Iceland, first brought to light certain manuscripts which he had been holding. No one is certain how he came to possess them, but in 1662, he sent them to King Frederick III of Denmark (Iceland was then under Danish rule). There they remained, known as the *Codex Regius*, until they were returned to Iceland in 1971. Paleographic evidence shows that they cannot have been produced before the beginning of the thirteenth century (Hollander, p. xiv), and that individual poems have been written by different scribes. The nature of their errors suggests that they were copied from at least two different sources, and not written from memory (Hollander). These manuscripts, together

with those collected by Arni Magnusson between 1690 and 1728 (the *Arnarnagnæn Collection*), the collection of Stephanius, held, until recently, at Upsala (*Codex Upsaliensis*) and a number of other smaller collections, form the backbone of the work now known as the *Poetic*, or *Elder Edda*. (Chantepie de la Saussaye, p. 9)

The poems of the *Elder Edda* are arranged by content. While the first section of the work is concerned with the deeds of the gods, the second details the deeds of men. They are written in a meter which was, at one time, common to all the Germanic peoples, as is represented by the Old High German and Old English heroic poems, *Hildebrandslied* and *Beowulf*. (Kristjánsson, p. 34). They do not follow the Latin pattern of regular rhythm and end-rhyme; rather they make extensive use of alliteration and the irregular stress of significant words.

In fact there are two *Eddas*; the poetic mentioned above, and a later, prose account known as the *Younger*, *Prose*, or *Snorra Edda*. Snorri Sturluson, the learned Icelandic historian and poet, intended this retelling of stories as a textbook for skaldic poets, who, living in a Christian era, may not have been possessed of all the “facts.” While Snorri lived from 1179 to 1241, the manuscript that contains his book, the *Codex Wormianus*, dates to 1300 (Faulkes, p. xii). These two works together combine to render a reasonably complete picture of Old Norse mythology. They, along with the Icelandic sagas and skaldic poems, are the earliest written sources we have for the mythology of the Germanic peoples.

PART III – THE LITERATURE

1. The *Vedas*

The Sanskrit term *veda* means “knowledge” or “wisdom” (Feuerstein et al., p. 16). Sacred knowledge in the ancient Indic tradition was maintained and transmitted through a rigorous oral tradition which regarded the lore as divine revelation. As such, it was not to be altered. Even when meanings were lost, the Vedic tradition required faithful transmission with absolute fidelity. Despite a lifetime of several thousand years, “only one uncertain reading of a single word can be found in the entire *Rig-Veda* (VII.44.3)” (Feuerstein et al., p. 16). There is abundant circumstantial

evidence to indicate that the *Vedas* were written down by the sixth century BCE (Mallory, p. 37).

The Sanskrit word *rig* means “praise,” and it refers specifically to the praise of the divine (Feuerstein et al., p. 28). The *Rig Veda* is a collection of 1,028 hymns in celebration of the gods of an Indo-European people who called themselves *Aryan*. Divided into ten books called *mandalas* (“circles” or “cycles”) and accompanied by a 117-hymn appendix, it is more than simply a storehouse of ancient lore; its lyrical verses have the tone of intimate, ritualized communications with the gods. Composed at various times and by many individuals, it may well be the oldest book in any Indo-European language. (Feuerstein et al., p. 29)

Rarely complete tales, the hymns of the *Rig Veda* presuppose a body of theological knowledge, allowing them to be dominated by the use of allusion and metaphor (Puhvel, p. 46). They contain, among other things, myths, paradoxes, and riddles. Daylight and the Sun are particularly prominent, and the lore is, in general, oriented more toward cosmology than eschatology. While more than half of the hymns invoke one of three main gods, scholars have put the total count of deities at thirty-three, sometimes conceived as a scheme of 3 x 11 (Puhvel, p. 48). Surprisingly the three main *Rig Veda* gods are not the three that have been discussed previously; they are Indra, Agni and Soma. There do exist, however, the nuclei of gods associated with the three *Ārya* social classes; while the Ksatriyas have Indra to look to, the Brahmins and Vaisyas have the Adityas (e.g., Mitra and Varuna) and the Vasus (e.g., the *Āsvins*), respectively (*Ibid.*).

Indra, whose deeds have been previously discussed, is a god much like those of the Norse pantheon. He is an independent character who personifies a segment of the population, and his ability to control natural forces is an attribute conferred by his divine status. Agni and Soma however, are of a significantly different nature. While most of the gods of the Indo-Europeans have some power to control the forces of nature, both Agni and Soma actually *are* those forces. Agni *is* the sacrificial fire, as well as the god who reigns sovereign over all its functions, just as Soma *is* the sacrificial beverage, the corresponding ritual, and its sovereign god. The personification of ritual forces may be a reflection of the intense degree of ritualism present in the culture.

The universe of the *Rig Veda* is divided into dualities and tripartitions. The primordial victory of creation is one of water over drought, and the primeval battle of the Aryans is characterized as a conflict between darkness and light. While the habitable world has two halves for gods and humans to reside in, the universe itself is composed of the *sat* (existence, truth) and the *asat* (nonexistence, untruth). The *sat*, where both gods and men reside, consists of the land, the sky, and the vault of heaven. It contains heat, light, and water. The *asat*, where demons dwell, has none of these. While the *sat* has order, or *rta*, the *asat* is chaotic, or *anrta* (Tyler, p. 44). Indra reigns supreme over the thirty-three gods of the *sat* (the duality of ruled and ruler), who are tripartitioned into representatives of either the land, the sky or the heavens. Gods such as Agni and Soma, both terrestrial divinities, act as intermediaries between the three levels. The *asat* is ruled by Vrtra and his cohorts, the Raksases, who "aid evil men, or snatch unsuspecting men from the face of the earth. They are most dangerous at night and during the journey of the dead along the path to heaven. Lurking on this path, they drag the unrighteous from it. For the righteous dead, two dogs stand on the path to ward off the Raksases." (Tyler, p. 45)

There are two cosmic creation myths, that of the *Devas*, and that of the *Asuras*. The Deva myth recounts the birth of the gods along lines similar to many other Indo-European accounts. In it, "Sky-Father" (*Dyaus*) impregnates "Earth-Mother" (*Prthivi*) with rain, who thusly conceives the gods (Tyler, p. 45). More dominant in the *Rig Veda* is the myth of the *Asuras*, which recounts the birth of the universe. The first dwelling of the gods, or *Asuras*, is a house made for them by the god Tvastṛ (artificer, builder). It is composed of both heaven and earth which, at this time, are not separated. Both the *sat* and the *asat* are contained within. The *Asuras* come to divide over an issue of light versus darkness, wherein the *Adityas* wish to expand and grow towards enlightenment, or light, while the *Danavas*, lead by Vrtra, prefer the darkness of intellectual and physical bondage. The *Danavas* are further subdivided into the *Raksases* (enemies of men) and *Pisacas* (enemies of the departed fathers). (Tyler, p. 46)

The *Adityas*, who wish to release the "cosmic waters" so that growth can commence, embark upon a war with the *Danavas* which they soon begin to lose. In need of a hero, they arrange for the birth of Indra, who, nursed on *soma*, grows to such enormous proportions that the earth and sky fly apart in terror. While the gods are born of the union of sky and earth, it is they who unwittingly force them apart.

Indra agrees to be champion of the Adityas on the condition that he is made king of the gods, to which they assent. Tvastr fashions the *vajra* ("thunderbolt") for him (Tyler, p. 45), and he uses it to slay Vrtra. The "cosmic waters" are thusly freed and the *sat* is set apart from the *asat*, giving the world light, heat, moisture and order. The battle, however, is recurring, and the gods require help from humans in the form of daily sacrifices in order to remain victorious. According to Tyler, "Daylight symbolizes the victory of the Adityas, and night the encroaching reign of the demons. For this reason, night is an evil time when the demons roam freely until the battle is renewed at the break of day with the morning sacrifice." (Tyler, p. 45)

The creation of human beings, among other things, is the result of a divine sacrifice made by the gods. In a manner similar to the Norse dismemberment of Ymir, the world is created from the body of a giant called Purusha.

When they divided Purusha how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?

The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became

the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced.

The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth; Indra and

Agni from his mouth were born, and Vayu from his breath.

Forth from his navel came mid-air; the sky was fashioned from his head; Earth from his

feet, and from his ear the regions. Thus they formed the worlds.

Seven fencing-sticks had he, thrice seven layers of fuel were prepared, when the gods,

offering sacrifice, bound, as their victim, Purusha."

(*Rig Veda* X. 90. 11 - 15) (Griffith, vol. 2, pp. 519 - 20)

The account is strikingly similar to the Norse version:

Of Ymir's flesh the earth was shaped,
 of his blood, the briny sea,
of his hair, the trees, the hills of his bones,
 out of his skull, the sky.

But of his lashes the loving gods made
 Mithgarth for sons of men;
from his brow they made the menacing clouds
 which in the heavens hover.

(*Grímnismál*, st. 41 - 42) (Hollander, p. 61)

In the earliest portions of the *Rig Veda*, all of the gods are referred to as *Asuras*, or "creatures possessed of occult powers" (Tyler, p. 45). Later, the name comes to be associated only with the demons of the Danavas, while the Adityas are known

collectively as *Devas*. The *Devas* themselves are not paragons of virtue, set up to serve as divine examples of a righteous life; they are merely the powerful sponsors of human existence. They are to be praised, nourished and supplicated to continue their sponsorship. Their only perfection lies in the world they create and maintain; their power, while manifest, can be checked by demons as well as by their own mistakes. Only priests can communicate with them, and the rest of the population, firmly entrenched in the hierarchy, must be content to leave divine matters to the Brahmins.

Agni, as both the god of sacrificial fire and the fire itself, acts as a kind of divine messenger. If he approves of the offering and the manner in which it is conducted, he will carry its essence -- the vapor or smoke -- up to the realm of the gods. There they will be nourished by it and, renewed in vigor, they will go on to defeat the enemy (Tyler, p. 48). He is also of primary import to the dead, who are cremated. At the funeral, he serves at least three functions: he is asked to send the deceased to "the fathers," to carry the oblation to the gods, and to purify the corpse. At least two fires are kindled. At the first Agni is invoked and asked to "cook" the corpse to perfection, destroying all impurities:

"Do not burn him entirely, Agni, or engulf him in your flames. Do not consume his skin or

his flesh. When you have cooked him perfectly, O knower of creatures, only then send him

forth to the fathers" (*Rig Veda* X. 16. 1) (O'Flaherty, p. 49)

Agni is both the chef and, usually, a diner as well (O'Flaherty, p. 46). When animals are sacrificed, he, along with the rest of the gods, are invited to consume them. There is, however, some ambivalence about this when he is called to the sacrifice of humans. Subsequent doctrines of transmigration notwithstanding, men go on to be with their ancestors when they die. While a man's breath is said to go to the winds, his body is apparently needed for the trip to the fathers, who will provide him with a new one:

"Set him free again to go to the fathers, Agni, when he has been offered as an oblation in

you and wanders with the sacrificial drink. Let him reach his own descendants, dressing

himself in a life-span. O knower of creatures, let him join with a body."

(*Rig Veda*, X. 16. 5) (O'Flaherty, p. 50)

It is therefore necessary that the corpse not be cremated to ash, but rather "cooked" only until it is pure enough to travel to the fathers.

While the first fire invokes Agni, entreating him to prepare the corpse, at the second he is asked to travel to the gods. A second, separate fire must be kindled for this purpose because contact with the dead has left the first impure. As the second fire is kindled, the first is purified and sent along on the divine mission (O'Flaherty, p. 47). Since both fires are Agni, it is clear that he is undergoing transformation. His role as purifier contaminates him, but the kindling of the second fire seems to "jump-start" him back to purity. Every time a match is struck, the flame is new. Agni is but one being; he cannot be at once both pure and impure -- he must make a transition from one to the other. As the second fire is struck, it pulls the first into purity. The first fire cannot simply be extinguished; to do so would not only be disrespectful to Agni, it would conclude the rite.

Similar in aspect to Agni, Soma is both the intoxicant itself and the divinity within. A psychotropic hallucinogen, the trance-inducing extract is pressed from the plant and then filtered. Its effects include "a sense of immense personal power," "intimations of immortality" -- the very qualities which make it so valuable to Indra -- and "colorful and violent visions" (O'Flaherty, p. 119; Puhvel, p. 65). A male deity, he is both the nourishment of the gods and the elixir which allows their priests to commune with them.

The majority of hymns composed to Soma extol his virtues as an intoxicant; the only story about him narrated in any detail concerns his birth and subsequent theft. Itself a common theme in Indo-European mythology, the "Theft of the Elixir of Immortality" is in this case committed by Indra, who then shares the draught with both gods and men. Soma, born in the heavens among the demons, is thought to be safe from Indra, a god of the sky who cannot quite reach him. But Indra enlists the

aid of an eagle who carries him to the heavenly vault, losing only a feather in the battle.

This story resembles two Norse myths contained within the *Skaldskaparmal* of the *Snorra Edda*. In the guise of an eagle, the giant Thjazi forces Loki to deliver to him Iðunn, guardian of the golden apples of youth. The gods, feeling wizened, clothe Loki in Freya's falcon dress and force him to retrieve her. A similar incident involves Óðinn, who manages to steal Kvasir -- now the mead of poetry -- back from the dwarfs. Disguising himself as a laborer, he dwells among them until he is able to consume all of the mead. Making his escape in the form of an eagle, he regurgitates it for all gods and men.

Tyler discusses the Soma sacrifice as an ecstatic cult devoted to the acquisition of immortality. It is individualized, focusing on the sacrificer and his abilities. Proper preparation and execution will confer ecstasy upon the sacrificing Brahman, allowing him to experience the divine.

"Bathed, anointed, and dressed in fresh garments, the sacrificer sits on a black antelope skin in a special hut near the sacrificial fire. Here he fasts in solitude through the night, generating the mysterious power of heat (tapas). Properly consecrated, the sacrificer quaffs the soma and acquires the power of the gods. .
." (Tyler, p. 48)

The Soma sacrifice draws the sacrificer into the world of the gods, where divinity cannot be denied. It connects him directly to the source of existence, where order, or *ṛta*, is perfect. It gives him the power of sacred speech, and the ability to commune with the gods themselves, as if one of them.

Mitra, god of close friendship and pacts between men, is rarely glimpsed without his companion Varuna, who is primary of the pair. A sky god bearing similarities to the Norse Týr, Varuna, too, watches over the deeds of men from his lofty perch, and the stars are his spies. He is the custodian of *ṛta*, or order, just as Týr is the keeper of

law. As such, he is king of all kings. He can, however, be likened to Óðinn as the more dangerous god of the pair. O'Flaherty characterizes his relationship with mankind as "stern but loving;" when Varuna is invoked to protect the worshipper from danger, the threat includes that posed by him (O'Flaherty, p. 209). Credited with many of the same deeds as other gods, he is said to have placed the sun in the sky and then used it to measure out the universe (*Rig Veda* V. 85; O'Flaherty, p. 211). Evil men he condemns to a subterranean "House of Clay" (Tyler, p. 47).

Max Müller pointed out that the Nasatyas, also known as Ásvins, are closely associated with the sun, which is personified in several aspects. They are the twin sons of Vivasvan (the sun) and the brothers of Surya, whom they marry. She is either the daughter of the sun and indeed their sister, or a female aspect of the sun itself and in that case, their mother. They are the healers of the sick, and they come riding to the rescue of people in danger as a sort of divine mounted police. Divine benefactors, they represent wealth, fecundity and love.

Over succeeding millennia, these divinities have wavered in importance, and others, such as Rudra-Siva, Krishna and Buddha have supplanted them. Agni is certainly not the god he once was, just as Hindu society is not Vedic society. And while Vedic society is quite different from that of the Norse, there are indeed intriguing parallels.

2. The *Eddas*

The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of poems about both gods and mortals, several of which contain short sections of explanatory prose. Its aim, like that of the *Prose Edda*, is to educate; to relate its tales of gods and ancestors in an entertaining and memorable way. Like Homer's *Iliad*, its oral tradition of song is betrayed often by repetition and formulaic structure. Thus while Homer has his "rosy-fingered dawn," Eddic composers have "wit ye further, or how?" and "Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well".

In contrast to the *Rig Veda*, the *Eddas* are not revealed knowledge, and they are not utilized in ritual. Narrative is preeminent, and invocations, ritual songs and sacred hymns are relatively absent from the work. A notable exception to this is "the beautiful invocation at the beginning of *Sigrdrífumál*:

Heill dagr

Hail day!

heilir dags synir

Hail sons of day!

heil nótt ok nipt!

And night and her daughter now!

Óreiðum augum

Look on us here

lítið okkr þinig

with loving eyes,

ok gefið sitjöndum sigr.

that waiting we victory win.

Heilir aesir

Hail to the gods!

heilar ásynjur

Ye goddesses hail!

heil sjá en fjölnýta fold!

And all the generous earth!

Mál ok mannvit

Give us wisdom

gefið okkr mærum tveim

and goodly speech

ok læknishendr meðan lifum.

and healing hands, life-long.”

(Einarsson, p. 39)

Even this occurs in a narrative context. The sole employ of the *Edda* is storytelling (Chantepie de la Saussaye, p. 198), and it is acknowledged to be the work of a people attempting to preserve a folk tradition.

The poems of the *Edda* likely trace their origin to the same period as those of the skalds, but there are significant differences between the two. The two styles employ

different meters, and the skaldic poetry is notable in particular for its frequent use of *kenningar*, which are used sparingly within the *Edda*. Skaldic poems are not generally anonymous as are the Eddic ones, and the two differ in character. For while the skalds sing mostly of kings and current figures, the Eddic poets speak of bygone days and things to come. It is on this basis that they are held to be separate. (Chantepie de la Saussaye, p. 198)

The *Poetic Edda* is arranged in two sections; the first discusses gods, while the second concerns the exploits of mortal heroes. The first section begins with *Voluspá*, “The Prophecy of the Seeress,” which serves as a kind of overture to the mythos. Óðinn, having raised the Seeress from the dead in order that she might divine the future, serves as the main character for the succeeding poems up to *Skírnismál*, which deals with Freyr. Þórr is the hero of the rest of the poems, with the exception of *Lokasenna*, which he brings to an end.

The heroic lays have traditionally been divided into three groups on the basis of tone, style, and cultural clues: (1) the oldest poems, “*Hamðismál*, *Atlakviða*, *Hlöðskviða*, and *Völundarkviða*, (2) the three Helgi lays and the Sigurðr trilogy on his youthful exploits, and (3) the heroic elegies dealing with his death and the fates of the two women who loved him, Brynhildr and Guðrún” (Einarsson, p. 35). Arranged as sagas, they overlap with historical material and as such are peopled by characters who have their basis in reality. The Hunnish king Attila, for example, is referred to as Atli. The Icelandic literary scholar Stefán Einarsson explains that while the newer elegies are characterized by “sentimental lyricism” and the Helgi lays by “Viking exuberance,” the older heroic poems are written with a “matter-of-fact acceptance of heroism” which tends to minimize the fighting itself. They seem also to have been maintained more strictly by the oral tradition, having picked up less evidence of transformation from legends into folktales. (Einarsson, p. 35)

None of the poems can be ascribed to a particular author with any degree of certainty, and the time and place of their birth can only be inferred from elements of form, content and style. In the year 1917 a stone was found at Eggjum in Sogn which was dated to not later than 700. It contained, in runic writing, what appeared to be magical verses (e.g., *ni s solu sot / uk ni sakse stain skorin*). Norwegian runologist Magnus Olsen later demonstrated this to be the same style of syncopated, alliterative poetry as that of the *Edda*. (Einarsson, p. 19) While this

does not imply that the *Edda* dates to same period, it does confirm that the style was in use by that date.

Scholars had long held that none of the poems, written in Old Icelandic, could possibly be older than the language was. Written in alliterative verses of well-defined meter, the poetry was not expected to survive the translation into Old Norse. But the Swede Erik Noreen demonstrated in 1926 that "certain *ljóðaháttir* poems (*Skírnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Fáfnismál*, but not *Sigrdrífumál*) could be turned into Primitive Old Norse without violating the metrical rules." (Einarsson, p. 19)

This kind of linguistic evidence is compelling, for the modern translator is well aware of the difficulties presented by poetry. While many of the stories contained in the *Edda* may have been known before the settlement of Iceland, these poems in particular were likely fully extant by that period. This indicates roots far older.

One of the oldest types of poetry, the *pula*, is represented in the *Edda*. Essentially a list of personalities, it is the foundation for several poems such as *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*, and the list of dwarfs in *Völuspá*. While it did experience a renaissance in the twelfth century, the earliest *pulur* on record is the Old English *Widsíp*. (Einarsson, p. 38) *Widsíp* is itself an example of the heroic tradition of poetry found throughout the Germanic tribes. It, along with *Beowulf* and the Old High German *Hildebrandsleid*, among others, offers evidence for a continuing tradition dating to at least the eighth century. The heroic boasting match, or *flyting*, in poems such as *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð*, has a long history as well; we have only to look to the flyting between Beowulf and Unferð for an ancient correspondence (Einarsson, p. 29).

Christianity came to Iceland in the year 1000, influencing not only the future but much of what had come before. A poem that can be demonstrated to be "absolutely heathen" will likely date to before that time, but the presence of Christian elements cannot be construed to indicate a later origin, as they may only indicate subsequent influence. A poem such as *Hávamál*, however, makes its heathen origin clear by way of its pragmatic Viking philosophy: disdain death and seek your fame, it says, and open your hearth to the wanderer who does the same; cut off from kin and company, he seeks only a warm meal and a comrade (Einarsson, p. 32).

Geographic location appears to vary from poem to poem. Many speak of a montane locale which could be either Norway or Iceland, but "the fir and the reindeer-hunt in *Hávamál*, the hart in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* are all strictly Norwegian, while the volcanic eruption and earthquake in *Völuspá* are definitely Icelandic. So is the use in the same poem of *pollr* "fir" for *askr* "ash": in Iceland there were no woods except birch, and the natives soon forgot the real meaning of the tree names. Occasionally there is another landscape, so the *groenar brautir* "green roads" of *Rígsþula* would fit the emerald isle, Eire, as would the name *Rígr* and the custom of inviting a stranger to sleep with the housewife." (Einarsson, p. 23)

In all likelihood the poems have both origins and influences scattered throughout these lands, as well as many others. The Swede Fritz Askeberg has speculated that heroic poetry spread from Scandinavia to Germany and England rather than vice-versa, as was the case with the spread from Scandinavia to England of works such as *Widsíp* and *Beowulf* (Einarsson, p. 34).

While the origins of the *Poetic Edda* remain unsettled, the *Prose Edda*, also known as the *Younger* or *Snorra Edda*, has definite authorship in the person of Snorri Sturluson. Dated to approximately 1222, Snorri intended his *Edda* as a handbook for poets. Essentially a recapitulation of Norse lore, it filled in many of the gaps left by the *Elder Edda*. One must read carefully, as it is clear from the outset that Snorri is intent on reconciling the heathen past with the Christian present, or at least on not contradicting the teachings of his church. He begins by ascribing human origins to the gods and maintaining that they were travelers from the east who grew in fame, wisdom and power. Some have suggested that their title, *Æsir*, may be related to *Asia*.

The gods of the *Eddas*, the *Æsir*, live together in a fortified city known as *Ásgarður*. It is fortified primarily against the giants, or *Jötnar*, with whom they are constantly fighting despite the fact that some of them are kin. Óðinn, king of the gods, is the most powerful, and all men who are killed in battle go to his hall, Valhöll. He is the god of poetry, runes, and magic. His son, Þórr (Thor), is the warder of Miðgarð, or the land of humans, as well as the humans themselves. As such, he is among the most popular of the gods. Wielding his war hammer, *Mjöllnir*, as well as the thunderbolt, he slays many trolls and Jötnar. Týr, god of both war and justice, has only one arm, having sacrificed the other to save the gods. The wolf Fenrir, a loose

and dangerous beast, is confined by the gods only through the intervention of Týr, who places his arm in the wolf's mouth as a pledge. As divine representative of the covenant, its loss is the price he has to pay for breaking one.

Among the gods in Ásgarður are three who belong to a different race of divinities known as the *Vanir*. Njörður, the god of seafaring and safe harbors, is the father of the *Vanir*, and of the other two hostages, Freyr and Freyja, who are associated with fertility, love, and abundance (Kristjánsson, p. 24). Some scholars have claimed that these deities represent the incorporation of an older religion, a so-called "fertility cult," which was in decline by the time of the Vikings (Brøndsted, p. 279). The myth of their incorporation into the *Æsir* has been previously related.

There are many other divinities besides these. Of primary import is Loki, the divine trickster. His character, while not found with any regularity in the rest of Indo-European lore, is common elsewhere. Often the scapegoat, always the mischief-maker, he is nonetheless the prime motivator behind much of the lore. His sexual escapades engender not only the demons Fenrir and the Miðgarð Worm, but also Óðinn's great steed Sleipnir (who in turn fathers Grani, mount of the hero Sigurd) and the goddess of death, Hel. He is responsible for getting the walls of Ásgarður built without the loss of Freya, as well as for the retrieval of both Þórr's hammer and Iðunn. While at fault in the death of Baldr, the much-loved god of the sun, his role is more often that of an intermediary between gods and giants. And while he does battle the gods at *Ragnarök*, his disloyalty has been inspired in part by harsh treatment at their hands.

In addition to Freya and Hel are many other female gods. They include Frigg, wife of Óðinn and the goddess of the hearth and home; Sif, wife of Þórr and the goddess of grains and the harvest; Skaði, wife of Njörður and goddess of the hunt; Sigyn, the devoted wife of Loki; and Iðunn, wife of Bragi and keeper of the golden apples. All of these female deities act of their own accord and with independent spirit, and while there is a divine hierarchy, none are subservient to their mates.

The universe is conceived of as a giant tree, *Yggdrasil*, which supports nine worlds. The tree upon which Óðinn hangs, Yggdrasil's roots support the worlds of giants (Jötunheim) and humans (Miðgarð), as well as the realm of Hel, goddess of death (Helheim). Elsewhere on the ash lie Ásgarður (home of the *Æsir*), Vanaheim (home of the *Vanir*), and Muspellheim (the fire world), among others. Besides gods, giant

and humans, these worlds are populated by a variety of beings including dwarfs, alfs and hidden folk.

Both the cosmology and the eschatology of the Norse are encapsulated within *Völuspá*. The creation of the world out of a “gaping nothingness” referred to as *Ginnungagap* is initiated by a great cow known as Audhumla. For in the Norse conception, even nothingness contains great blocks of salty seawater-ice for the cow to lick, who, in doing so, reveals the head of the Frost-Giant Buri. Buri then bears the Giant Ymir, who is dismembered by Óðinn and his brothers, Vili and Vé, in order to create the universe (Hollander, p. 2). The Hindus, too, relate a cow to the beginning of life; known as *vāc*, she represents the first vibration or sound in the universe (Titchenell, p. 47).

According to the Seeress, the end of the world, known as *Ragnarök*, will be ushered in by Loki and his “son,” the wolf Fenrir, both of whom have been bound by the gods. They, together with the Jöntar, will launch a massive attack against both the Æsir and Vanir. Most of the combatants will be killed in the conflict, and eventually the earth will be destroyed by the flames of the Fire-Giant Surtur. This doom is inevitable, but the Seeress speaks also of rebirth. The earth will rise again from the sea, lush and green, and the survivors will live on in the homes of their ancestors.

PART IV -- SYNTHESIS

1. Aryan Invasion Theory

A superficial look at both the *Rig Veda* and the *Poetic Edda* reveals little similarity between the two. They differ in both structure and purpose, the one being highly ritualized while the other is intended, in part, to amuse. They display little overt continuity of theme or personage and one, while being far more comprehensive, is actually less informative than the other. A closer look reveals the deeper truth, however, that certain elements do indeed appear to remain consistent. Among these are the tripartite structure so thoroughly discussed by comparative mythologists, a hierarchy of gender where women are ranked below men, a vocational hierarchy where laborers rank below warriors, and an oft-mentioned

emphasis on horses and cows, which is not surprising considering their importance to both societies.

Despite significant differences, both mythologies appear to share these basic structural elements, as well as some of the same distinctive themes and characters. There are too many similarities to be explained by chance, and while individual characters and tales may diffuse readily, elements of structure are far less mobile. This structural commonality is, in itself, an argument for common parentage. It as if the houses of both mythologies were built, quite differently, upon the same foundation. Significant differences between them can be explained by a multitude of factors, not the least of which are geographical and temporal placement.

There appear to be social corollaries are well. Separated by substantial amounts of both time and space, there are commonalties nonetheless. Both cultures evince social and ideological tripartition. Both place enormous stock in the warrior, advocating aggressive behavior. Both practice human and animal sacrifice, both perform cremation, and both incorporate the self-immolation of widows into the funeral rites of men. Both cultures probably made sport of horse racing, and both measured wealth by the cow. While these details alone are not sufficient to postulate a relationship between the two religious systems, when taken together with the structural similarities, the entire picture becomes quite convincing.

The question, then, is not, "Are they related?" but, "What is the temporal distance of the relationship?" Scholars have placed the date for the creation of the *Rig Veda* at around 1500 BCE, and that of parts of the *Poetic Edda* at around 700 CE, but the deities of both may have been extant long before. The date given for the *Rig Veda* is meant to coincide with the arrival of the Aryan invaders, but the stories it contains are *about* that period of time, so they must have been conceived at an even later date. 1500 BCE is the *terminus post quem* for the tales of the *Rig Veda*; likely most of its deities are older. In the case of the *Edda*, 700 CE is the date by which certain tales are known to have gelled; deities again may well be older. Therefore it represents a *terminus ante quem* for these particular tales. All these dates seem to indicate with any certainty is that Vedic mythology cannot be any older than 3500 years, while Eddic mythology, likely no older than the first period of Germanic

migrations, is closer to 1500 years old. They were therefore created by peoples who lived approximately 2000 years apart.

The cosmologies underlying these works are more difficult to discuss, for they may have been extant at nearly any time prior to the appearance of their respective mythologies. It is difficult to determine where and when a cosmological schism occurs. It may coincide with the linguistic schism, which is similarly difficult to identify; the Old Icelandic example given previously demonstrated that not only mythology, but mythic poetry can survive the shift. What it probably cannot survive is a dramatic change in the culture. If a culture adapts to fit a new situation, the mythos, too, must adapt or die; if the change is significant enough, over time it may become unrecognizable.

This kind of change does not happen quickly; entire populations do not usually traverse great cultural or ideological distance within a short period of time. When a great physical distance is traveled in a short time, the people may approach as conquerors who enforce their ideology on those they subjugate, or as intruders who, over ensuing generations, eventually assimilate. Under certain circumstances the ideologies of native and intruder may merge, as in the case of modern religions such as *Santeria*. Ideologies do not change instantly but rather show remarkable persistence in the face of conflicting information.

While it is currently impossible to know when the cosmological schism occurred, it can safely be said that it happened before 700 CE and the birth of Eddic mythology. Vedic and Eddic mythology in fact differ widely enough to suggest that their respective cosmologies had plenty of time to evolve, likely far more than the two millennia that currently separate them. That length of time has not even been enough to significantly affect the gospel of Christ, who had a schism -- significantly smaller -- of his own [2]. In fact there is considerable evidence to indicate that the people who created these myths are separated by more than the two millennia claimed; surely their respective cosmologies are even older. One must simply compare the textual record to the archaeological one and the details become clear.

The *Rig Veda* is an extremely complex book. Read often as a work of history, it is a collection of songs requiring the eye of a poet. Academics like Wheeler and Müller offer literal interpretations, ignoring its poetry. Both poetry and prose use language which is often symbolic, particularly when the context is ritualized or dramatized; the

seer-poets of the *Rig Veda* used symbolic language in a ritualized context to communicate with their gods. Ordinary language is not as powerful, nor does it contain as much information. Therefore to read the “dark foe” of the *Rig Veda* as Dravidian may be akin to reading the “Prince of Darkness” as a royal African. It is pure conjecture, and it does not take the nature of what it is evaluating into account.

To take a significant example, there is a single instance where the Dasyus (the enemy) are referred to as *amasa*, or “noseless.” This has consistently been read as a pejorative reference to the Dravidians of south India, who are imagined to possess broader, flatter noses than those of the Aryans. In other instances, however, the Dasyus are referred to as “handless” and “footless.” Taken together, these descriptions add up to a picture of the Vedic race of serpent-demons (Feuerstein et al., p. 111). A snake, of course, lacks a protruding proboscis as well as hands and feet. There need not be any relationship to the Dravidians.

The same academic eye that has seen these “relationships” has often been blind to the facts. While Wheeler referred to *Rig Vedic* hymns that speak of the Aryan gods as destroyers of fortresses, he failed to discuss those that refer to the Vedic people as *builders* of cities (Feuerstein et al., p. 79). If the *Rig Veda* was written before the establishment of Gangetic civilization, to what cities did it refer? The only ones found thus far, at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, have been classified as forts. When does the presence of a wall constitute a fort, and when does it indicate that a city has been sheltered from floods or attacks? Perhaps when anthropologists decide it does.

The conflict between humans described in the *Rig Veda* offers no direct evidence for an invasion; rather, the battles appear to have been *intertribal*. Careful scrutiny of the text reveals the fact that the combatants were of the same culture (Feuerstein et al., p. 159), and while the gods of the Aryans are referred to as fortress-destroyers (perhaps in symbolic context), there is no discussion of the Aryans themselves as “invaders.” It is difficult to imagine that such an invasion ever occurred when neither the Hindus – descendants of the Aryans – nor the Dravidians, who have been identified as their victims, have any memory of the event (Feuerstein et al., p. 156), and there is virtually no archaeological evidence to support it (Fairervis, p. 346). Additionally, if the Aryans were not native to the region, one would expect to find clues to their origin within the *Rig Veda*. Yet there is no mention of a homeland

outside of India (Feuerstein et al., p. 156). On the contrary, the *Rig Veda* busily extols the virtues of India herself. One must wonder at the group of invaders who would compose such admiring hymns to a country they had ravaged without mentioning once their own native lands.

The meaning, too, of the word *Aryan* has been construed in a number of different ways. While it is not necessary to enter into a discussion of Nazi race theory here, it is worth stating that theirs was not the only spurious interpretation. “*Arya*” stems from the Sanskrit term for “noble” or “cultured” (Feuerstein et al., p. 46). An *Aryan* is one who is *arya*, or a noble believer; as practicing members of the Vedic tradition, this is how the composers of the Vedic hymns described themselves. Thus, the word *Aryan* did not denote a particular racial or linguistic affiliation, but rather a common set of mind.

The term *dasyu* was applied to “fallen Aryans,” ignoble folk who could be reinstated as *arya* once purified (Feuerstein et al., p. 112). Often misconstrued to refer disparagingly to the Dravidians, the two terms are meant to be opposites within the same construction. While what is *an-arya* can never be *arya*, the *dasyu* can be *arya* again. *Arya* and *dasyu* are terms employed to describe not race but behavior, and the categories are not immutable (Feuerstein et al., p. 114).

Eventually, the Indians came to be called *daha*, cognate with *dasyu*, by the Iranians (Feuerstein et al., p. 111). This and the fact that the Sanskrit *deva*, for “god,” occurs under its Iranian cognate *daeva*, meaning “demon” (Mallory, p. 42), indicates that a schism separated the two cultures at some point. One of the least contested dictums of comparative linguistics states, in fact, that the Indic and Iranian languages were once one (Mallory, p. 36). Some have suggested that the Vedic conflict between the *Aryans* and *Dasyus* may represent a primeval struggle between the Indo-Aryans and Indo-Iranians (Feuerstein et al., p. 111), which would push the creation of the *Rig Veda* back quite some time to a period preceding the linguistic schism.

Assuming now that the Aryans were not invaders but simply the composers of the *Vedas*, the first place to look for the birth of their culture is among the cities of the Indus Valley . This culture horizon now appears to have been substantially underestimated. Sites located in Afghanistan have been identified as lying within the cultural field, thus bringing part of the Iranian world into the classification

(Feuerstein et al., p. 62). If the hypothesis stated in the previous paragraph is accepted, this would mean that the Indo-Iranian schism occurred sometime during or after the decline of Harappan culture, that the *Rig Veda* predates this schism, and that the later Vedic texts which display the shift in terminology were composed thereafter.

Over 2500 settlements of various periods including the Harappan era have been identified since Fairservis took his count. The Harappan sites form a chain from Ropar in the Punjab to Lothal and Dhaulavira in Gujarat, all along the course of a long-dead river in an area that is now known as the Thar Desert (Feuerstein et al., p. 62). This desert lies between the Indus and Gangetic valleys, extending over an area of roughly 100,000 square miles. Geologists have determined that it was once traversed by a river that was larger than the Indus, the mighty Sarasvati of the Vedic scriptures. Referred to as the “mother” of India in the *Rig Veda*, the composers of these hymns spoke often of a “Land of Seven Rivers,” of which Sarasvati, “She Who Flows,” was the largest (Feuerstein et al., p. 89).

"This stream Sarasvati with fostering current comes forth, our sure defense, our fort of iron.

As on a car, the flood flows on, surpassing in majesty and might all other waters."

(*Rig Veda* VII. 95. 1) (Griffith, p. 90)

The Hindus of the Ganges do not live in a land with seven rivers; it ceased to exist after the death of the Sarasvati at around 1900 BCE (Feuerstein et al., p. 89). Only the early Harappans lived there, as did the Vedic Aryans. This would seem then to be the new *terminus ante quem* for the *Rig Veda*. And indeed, as the Vedic lore grows younger, its emphasis shifts away from the Sarasvati and toward the Ganges. While the Indus River, long the focus of archaeologists, has never been the focus of Vedic lore, the discovery of a river that shrunk in size corresponds well to the Vedic one that shrunk in significance (Feuerstein et al., p. 91).

The Sarasvati appears to have changed its course at least four times prior to its extinction, gradually turning the region to desert (Feuerstein et al., p. 91). These shifts may have been initiated by a series of tectonic events, not unusual at a plate boundary such as the one between India and Asia. While there is no clearcut

evidence of Harappan sites being disrupted by earthquakes, there is ample evidence for the flooding and changes in river courses that may have occurred as a result (Feuerstein et al., p. 91). Thus the same type of tectonic events that dried up the Sarasvati may have flooded the Indus , cutting short the lives of both settlements at different periods.

When the Sarasvati dried up, the cultural locus shifted to the Indus valley; when that, too, failed, another shift occurred toward the Ganges . The Gangetic Valley , occupied since at least 5000 BCE, did not truly blossom until several hundred years after the decline of the Indus civilization (Feuerstein et al., p. 93). It took more than thirty generations before the “second urbanization” of the Ganges and Yamuna valleys began around 1000 BCE. A site at Dwarka, dated to around 1500, may represent an intermediate stage. It has been suggested that the “forest books,” or *Aranyakas*, may be a recollection of this period of forest living; if so, they, along with the *Upanishads*, would date to the second millennium BCE (Feuerstein et al., p. 96), thus confirming a date for the *Rig Veda* prior to 1500 BCE.

The rise of Gangetic civilization has been associated with the end of Painted Gray Ware (1200 - 800 BCE) and the introduction of Northern Black Polished Ware. Painted Gray Ware has long been thought to have been brought to India by invading Aryans, but recent scholarship has determined that it may in fact have been a “natural development in craftsmanship from earlier pottery styles” (Feuerstein et al., p. 98). Since some Late Harappan sites were contemporary with the Painted Gray Ware phase, there appears to be a continuous tradition linking the pottery of the Harappans to that of the Gangetic civilization. Feuerstein, Subhash, Kak and Frawley speculate that "scholars are beginning to appreciate that past civilizations have had their own changes in fashion, which need not necessarily have been triggered by outside influences. All the evidence points to a striking continuity between the early urban culture of Mehrgarh and the second urbanization witnessed in the fertile valley of the Ganges, which gave rise to the modern Hindu civilization." (Feuerstein et al., p. 98)

Archaeologists have traditionally argued that their excavations in the Indus Valley offered no support for the Vedic conclusion. They claim this despite the fact that copper, barley, and cattle, all Vedic elements, have been found at the early site of Mehrgarh (which will be discussed shortly), and Vedic-style fire altars as well as

implements used in the *Soma* sacrifice have been found at Harappan sites (Feuerstein et al., p. 157). The Harappans practiced cremation and likely, ritual bathing as well, just as the later Hindus do (Feuerstein et al., p. 74). The find most commonly cited as confirming an invasion -- the skeletal remains of thirty-eight people who appear to have died violently -- has been thrown into doubt by the realization that the excavators did not keep very good records, nor did they employ adequate technique. As a consequence, the levels to which the remains belong are unknown, and their context is questionable (Feuerstein et al., p. 78). The loss of this piece of data leaves nothing in the archaeological record that would indicate a large-scale invasion or even significant migrations into India during the Post-Harappan era (Feuerstein et al., p. 107).

If Vedic society and the Indus civilization are indeed discontinuous, then there should be few if any religious parallels. This is not the case. The existence of a separate class of priests at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro is almost universally accepted, and evidence abounds for the use of Vedic-style fire altars. Sacrificial altars have been found throughout the Indus area, including the row of seven that were excavated at Kalibangan near the confluence of the Vedic rivers Sarasvati and Drishavati. Aligned north-south, they may parallel the six Vedic *dhishnya* hearths if the seventh is seen as a separate, implement-purifying fire (Feuerstein et al., p. 124), or they may simply reiterate the Vedic concern with the number seven. Other round and ovoid altars have been discovered, some containing the remains of Vedic-style sacrifices such as beads and gold. One altar has the five layers prescribed by Vedic lore. (Feuerstein et al., p. 124)

Intriguing evidence for the continuity of Indus civilization with Vedic culture comes from the imagery displayed on numerous steatite seals that have been found. Preconceived notions about the inhabitants of Harappa have biased their interpretation by scholars as not only non-Vedic, but non-Indo-European. A number of them depict a human figure in combat with a serpent or dragon (Feuerstein et al., p. 135). While the theme itself is common to much Indo-European mythology, it is quite possible that it is Indra and the demon Vrtra who are being represented. The most common image is that of a "strangely-elongated" animal with one horn. If a unicorn, it can perhaps be linked to the prominence of the *eka-shringa* of later Hindu literature; more likely it is a composite animal, in which case it may well be the bull-

horse mount of Indra, Vrishashva (Feuerstein et al., p. 133). As the principal deity of the Vedic age, it would not be surprising if Indra were the referent of both designs.

Also depicted in steatite is a horned male deity. Seated in yoga posture, he is generally placed upon a podium and surrounded by wild animals. Many scholars agree that he represents the prototype for the Hindu Lord of Beasts. Several Vedic deities are referred to by this term, but it later becomes associated with the Hindu deity Shiva Pashupati, who is the “archetypal yogi” (Feuerstein et al., p. 122).

Additionally, the Indic scholar I. Mahadevan has suggested that seals depicting what appears to be a bull standing at a feedbag actually represent the Vedic Soma ritual. The bull symbolizes both Indra, likened often to a rutting bull, and *soma*, the beverage that produces his strength. The bag that hangs before him is a woollen sieve used to strain the beverage during the ritual sacrifice (Feuerstein et al., p. 123).

It is important to note that the *Vedas* themselves preserve only the lore of the priests. This knowledge was probably inaccessible to the common people, who likely had their own traditions. Vedic lore is not even “folk” lore in the sense that it was not available for mass consumption, and the folk traditions of the non-priestly classes may have differed from it significantly. There is also the possibility that, as today, the majority of people lived in a rural setting at some distance from the city where a divergent tradition was even more likely to develop (Feuerstein et al., p. 124). Engaged primarily in agriculture and animal husbandry, their concerns would be different from those of the city-dwellers, and so might their religious beliefs. One might therefore expect to find certain ritual artifacts associated with rural or private dwellings that are not found in urban, priestly settings. And while one altar may have served the entire community of priests, each family would likely have its own ritual objects.

Among the evidence in support of this idea are the numerous clay female figurines that to scholars suggest the worship of a Mother Goddess (Feuerstein et al., p. 121). The river Sarasvati, often personified as a goddess, might have been of particular importance to agriculturalists. Her importance at household shrines as opposed to priestly rites might explain the frequency of such finds, and other goddesses present in the Vedic lore as well as in modern Hinduism attest to the relevance of female divinity in Indic society. Additionally, two types of polished

stones have been found with some regularity which have been taken to represent the male and female genitalia. The veneration of sexual apparatus is not out of place in Vedic society, and some scholars would name as its precursors the grinding stones of the Soma sacrifice (Feuerstein et al., p. 122).

Perhaps the most challenging question has been that posed by the undeciphered Indus script. Proponents of the Aryan invasion theory decided long ago that the language represented on the seals of Harappa is not Indo-European; this was largely a result of their earlier decision that the Dravidians are not Indo-European. There were two reasons for this; they were identified with the victims of the Aryan invasion, and their language is decidedly different. While the latter is undeniable, the former now seems unlikely.

The languages of southern India have long been placed in a different linguistic group than those of the north and referred to as “Dravidian” to distinguish them from the family of Indo-European languages. Westerners were quick to note that skin color appears to grow darker as one travels south, and connecting the two, decided that India was made up of two different races. Language and race have nothing to do with one another, and skin color is not too reliable, either. Strictly speaking, the Dravidians are “members of the same Mediterranean branch of the Caucasian race” as the “Aryans” are (Feuerstein et al., p. 140). Thus the Dravidians, who were conceived of as linguistically distinct, may have been wrongly separated from peoples to whom they were genetically related.

Recent scholarship, however, appears to be bridging the linguistic gap between the Dravidians and Aryans. While there are only about twenty Dravidian loan-words in the *Rig Veda*, more than fifty percent of the Dravidian vocabulary is “borrowed” from Sanskrit (Feuerstein et al., p. 142). The Dravidians also appear to have “borrowed,” along with a number of myths and divinities, the title “Aryan” for their kings, and a *Rig Veda*-era sage named Agastya to father their language (*Ibid.*). The possibility that the same culture may have evolved more than one distinct language must be admitted. After all, India is a pretty big place.

Assuming that the Dravidians know where their own language came from, it is both Indo-European (at least in part) and younger than the *Rig Veda*. If it is younger than the *Rig Veda*, its speakers cannot be the enemies spoken of therein, as they would not yet have existed as a distinctive group; their distinctiveness is linguistic but their

language had not yet been born. And if the Dravidians do turn out to be, as has been almost universally claimed, the authors of the Indus script, then it will be as Proto-Indo-Dravidians. While the *Rig Veda* was written in Sanskrit, it may have been composed in this earlier tongue, and Sanskrit may have evolved after the languages split off from one another. This would explain the presence of Dravidian loan-words in Sanskrit, as well as the preponderance of Sanskrit words in Dravidian. These latter words may simply be the remnants of what was once a shared vocabulary. Finally, if the Indus script is found to be Proto-Indo-Dravidian, it might then correlate temporally with the composition of the *Rig Veda*, which, according to the Dravidians, is also Proto-Indo-Dravidian.

There is circumstantial evidence to identify the Indus script with the Dravidians, or with the Elamites, who may be related to them linguistically. The hypothesis, which favors invasion theory, states that at one time the Dravidian languages occupied nearly all of India (Mallory, p. 44). The Indo-Aryans then came into India from the north and, spreading their language to the east and south, drove the Dravidians south. Brahui, a “remnant Dravidian language,” still survives to the west of the Indus.

Thusly are the Dravidians the victims of the Aryans and the original inhabitants of Harappa . In addition, David McAlpin has demonstrated that Brahui may be related to the language of the Elamites; he sees it as an intermediate stage in the divergence of a language he calls Proto-Elamo-Dravidian (Mallory, p. 45). The Elamites of southern Iran were literate, leaving behind texts from the third millennium BCE onward; McAlpin puts the date of their linguistic divergence at about 5000 BCE. The mere presence of these two languages in or near the Indus Valley at this early date makes them candidates for the authorship of the Indus script. No one is certain of what Indo-Aryan was; perhaps it was the progenitor of all of these languages, including Sanskrit. Perhaps it never existed at all.

If Proto-Elamo-Dravidian or Proto-Indo-Dravidian provides the link from the *Rig Veda* to the Indus civilization, then Brahmi is the link to the Ganges . Nearly one thousand years after the decline of Indus civilization, the Brahmi script came into use in Gangetic India . Used by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka to declare edicts throughout India around 300 BCE, it was deciphered by James Prinsep in 1837. Each letter represents a consonant plus the vowel *a*, and alternate vowels are indicated by a slight modification of the basic sign. When consonants occur next to one another, one sign is placed over the other. It is likely that a system as sophisticated and easy

to use as this was preceded by more complex schemes. The signs themselves may be simplifications of characters from an earlier, ideogrammatic system such as the Indus script.

Subhash Kak has recently applied the science of statistics to this very hypothesis. Noting similarities in appearance between the most frequent letters of both the Indus and Brahmi scripts, he performed a frequency analysis upon the “cognate” pairs. His data reveals a correlation significant enough to lead Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley to announce, “The chance that this is a coincidence is so small that one can safely say that Brahmi is derived from Indus-Sarasvati. Furthermore, a structural analysis of the inscriptions indicates that the texts on the steatite seals follow grammatical rules like that of Sanskrit.” (Feuerstein et al., p. 138)

The Brahmi script, while still of uncertain linguistic affiliation, links the civilization of the Indus Valley to that of the Ganges . If early Gangetic civilization derived its writing system from that used at Harappa , perhaps its lore -- the later Vedas -- is derivative as well. It seems rather unlikely that invading Aryans would adopt lock, stock and barrel, the writing system, social structure and religion of the people they invaded while retaining their own language (Feuerstein et al., p. 156). And as the Aryan invasion theory lies dying, the *Rig Veda* grows older.

Having demonstrated the continuity of the Sarasvatic, Indic and Gangetic societies, it becomes clear that the date ascribed for the creation of the *Rig Veda* can be moved back at least to the lifetime of the Sarasvati River . Estimated to have run dry by approximately 1900 BCE, it provides us with our *terminus ante quem*. Recent work, however, may allow us to hypothesize a date even earlier. Archaeologist S. R. Rao believes he has finally deciphered the Indus script beyond its affiliation with Brahmi. By systematically substituting each basic Indus character with the sound value of the West Asian character it most closely resembles, he was able to reconstruct a language remarkably similar to Aryan Sanskrit (Agrawal); perhaps this is “Proto-Indo-Elamo-Dravidian.” Among the many words revealed by this method were several numbers, various Vedic deities, and an assortment of common terms including *apa*, or “water;” *anna*, or “food;” *dyau*, or “heaven;” and *para*, or “supreme.” Even a minor correspondence arrived at through so brute a method would be impressive; his results are astounding. If the language of the *Rig Veda* does indeed

turn out to be the progeny of that on the Harappan seals, the date of its birth may be reasonably pushed back another thousand years.

Western archaeologists propounding the Aryan invasion hypothesis have themselves provided the bullets to shoot it down. In some cases, the dates they unwittingly suggest are incredibly early. Tyler himself discusses the Amri culture of India, dated to early in the third millennium BCE. All of the sites, he explains, are located above the flood plains of Indus tributaries, and many were fortified with walls. While the Amri pottery tradition has been considered distinct from that of the Harappans, it is, he admits, "still possible to see in [it] the beginnings of the distinctive motifs of the Indus pottery" (Tyler, p. 30). He goes on to say that the Amri culture can be read as a predecessor to Indus civilization. He offers two hypotheses for what became of the Amri: either they built the cities of the Indus in response to external threat, or they were conquered by the people who did. The former hypothesis, thwarted perhaps by a time differential of several hundred years, merely gives us an earlier date for the establishment of Indus civilization. The latter would allow us read the "forging of the Indus empire" as a "record of imperial conquest" (*Ibid.*), the very theme reflected in the *Rig Veda*. This would also represent a leap back of nearly a millennium.

An even earlier settlement at some distance from the Indus appears to have escaped nearly everyone's notice. While the earliest layers at Mohenjo-Daro, inaccessible due to water, likely date to a period before 3000 BCE, the site of Mehrgarh in eastern Pakistan has been dated, incredibly, to 6500 BCE (Feuerstein et al., p. 143). This locates it within the early Neolithic, that crucial period of time marking the transition from the culture of the nomadic pastoralist to that of the agriculturalist (Feuerstein et al., p. 145). There is reason to believe that this culture, too, is related to that of the Indus cities.

The earliest level of occupation reveals the remains of several rectangular buildings made of mud brick, each containing four to six symmetrical rooms (Feuerstein et al., p. 148). This symmetry, referred to in the case of Mohenjo-Daro as "militaristic," may belie an ideological rigidity as well as a continuity of a tradition. Perhaps the geometrical and mathematical precision that leads to the dull uniformity of such settlements reflects the discipline of a highly ritualized society such as the Vedic. As Feuerstein, Subhash, Kak and Frawley say of Mohenjo-Daro, "If not the might of

the sword, what held this expansive urban civilization together? We would probably be not far off the truth to assume that cohesiveness was achieved by a shared religious worldview according to which everything had its proper place and station in life." (Feuerstein et al., p. 75)

There is evidence for the use of the potter's wheel at Mehrgarh more than six thousand years ago, and the town, a "thriving marketplace for imported and exported goods," had many storage facilities for the work of craftsmen such as "potters, bead makers, basket makers, and stonemasons" (Feuerstein et al., p. 148). They imported "jade and turquoise from Central Asia, lapis lazuli from northern Afghanistan, fuchsite (a jadelike material) from the south of India, shells from the coast of the Arabian Sea, and no doubt a good many other products from elsewhere" (Feuerstein et al., p. 150). Perhaps most importantly, a number of round seals similar in structure and function to those of the Harappans have been uncovered (Feuerstein et al., p. 71). Their different shape does not preclude the possibility of their being precursors to the later tradition.

The hypothesis that cattle were introduced into India by Aryan invaders around 1500 BCE is refuted by the discovery, at Mehrgarh, of the remains of domesticated cattle; they also possessed sheep and goats (*Ibid.*). There is evidence to indicate that cattle held the same place of prominence among these people as they do in modern Indian society. After about 4000 BCE, an advance in technology may have made the exploitation of the flood plains possible. Settlements became more numerous in northwestern India, laying perhaps the groundwork for the "great and populous cities of the third millennium" (Feuerstein et al., p. 152).

J. P. Mallory has remained quite convinced that the Aryans were invaders. When looking at the Indus civilization of the Harappan era, he concludes:

"Other than the Indus script, the very character of Indian society reflected in the earliest Vedic literature renders it highly unlikely that the Indus civilization was the product of Indo-Aryans. Although the earliest Vedic hymns are focused geographically on the Indus

and its major tributaries on the Punjab, the culture represented in them bears little similarity to that of the urban society found at Harappa or Mohenjo-Daro . It is illiterate, non-urban, non-maritime, basically uninterested in exchange other than that involving cattle, and lacking in any forms of political complexity beyond that of a king whose primary function seems to be concerned with warfare and ritual." (Mallory, p. 45)

Mallory is wrong here on several counts. Firstly, the earliest Vedic hymns are focused on the Sarasvati rather than the Indus. Next, even the culture represented at Mehrgarh, thousands of years earlier, is interested in exchange. Does he mean to suggest that the *Rig Veda* predates an interest in trade? That would certainly make it a substantially earlier work. Even the level of political complexity he assigns it is incorrect; the tripartite structure of Vedic society and the three-plus-one system of social class would seem to indicate a far greater complexity than he allows. His assertion that Vedic society was non-maritime is also incorrect, for the *Rig Veda* mentions "the two oceans to the east and west (probably the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea), just as they mention ships and maritime trade" (Feuerstein et al., p. 115).

Additionally, while no surviving written records have been found, this is not conclusive proof of Vedic illiteracy. As in later times, any writing from that period may have been done on organic material that would not have survived, such as tree bark or palm leaves (Feuerstein et al., p. 130). Perhaps the Vedic composers thought the hymns too holy to be committed to such a perishable medium, preferring instead to trust them to collective memory. Perhaps, as in later societies, the ignorance of the common people was fundamental to the structure of the society. Hence, the hymns could not be written for fear that they might find circulation among the people. Finally, if the Indus script does bear any relation to

Vedic society, there in itself is the writing. Perhaps such a system, used for trade and commerce, was too profane to be used for the scriptures.

While Vedic society may not have been literate, it was highly skilled in mathematics; likely it did possess a system of numbers. The *Rig Veda* provides ample evidence for the superior skill of Vedic astrologers and mathematicians. Fire altars, for example, were surrounded by 360 stones. This number represents a mathematical compromise reached in order to reconcile the solar and lunar years. Vedic fire altars were intended to symbolize the division of the earth, the atmosphere, and the sky, which was meant to stand for the universe as a whole (Feuerstein et al., p. 202). Of the 360 stones,

"21 were around the earth altar, 78 around the atmosphere altar, and 261 around the sky altar. In other words, the earth, the atmosphere, and the sky were given the symbolic value of 21, 78, and 261 respectively. Since the cosmos was thought to include the atmosphere and the sky, the two principal cosmological numbers were 21 and 339 (78 + 261)." (Feuerstein et al., p. 203)

While 21 may be a reflection of the significance of the numbers 7, for the Land of the Seven Rivers, and 3, for the tripartite ideology, 339 is a number of cosmic significance. It is "the number of solar disks it takes to measure the Sun's path across the sky during equinox: $\pi \times 108 = \text{circa } 339$ " (Feuerstein et al., p. 205). In addition, the *Rig Veda* consists of 1017 hymns (excluding 11 supplemental hymns), or 3×339 . These hymns have been divided by Vedicists into 216 groups. One-half of that number, 108, is

"roughly the average distance between the Sun and the Earth in terms of solar diameters. It is also the average distance between the Moon and Earth in

terms of lunar diameters. These values can be obtained by simple measurements with the naked eye. For example, if a pole of a certain height were to be separated from the observer by a distance that is 108 times this height, its angular size would be exactly equal to that of the Sun or Moon." (Feuerstein et al., p. 205).

It is interesting here to note the hymn mentioned earlier that discusses Varuna's use of the sun as a measuring stick (*Rig Veda* V. 85; O'Flaherty, p. 211).

Geological evidence contained within the *Rig Veda* suggests a compositional date significantly earlier than 1900 BCE, when the Sarasvati ceased to exist. Astronomical evidence, however, points to even earlier dates, for the *Vedas* refer to astronomical events that could only have occurred in the period from 2000 to 6000 BCE (Feuerstein et al., p. 105).

"Hermann Jacobi, a renowned German scholar of the Vedic literature, noted that one of the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* (V. 18 - 19) suggests a stellar pattern that could only have occurred in the period from 4500 B.C. to 2500 B.C., indicating a time in which the winter solstice occurred with the full moon in the Phalguni constellation, marking the later portion of the sign Leo and the early portion of the sign Virgo. It is clear from this hymn that its author was not referring to some distant past but to his own time." (Feuerstein et al., p. 106)

The *Rig Veda* may well be the oldest living body of literature in the world. It provides continuity in Indian history, serving as a link from the Neolithic town at Mehrgarh to the buried settlements on the Sarasvati, through the Bronze Age of the Indus Valley to the modern culture of the Ganges. The American anthropologist James G. Shaffer, arriving at an unusually wholistic view, has divided early Indic civilization into four distinct phases: the *food-producing era* (6500 - 5000 BCE), characterized by an absence of pottery, the *regionalization era* (5000 - 2600 BCE), marked by distinct regional styles, the *integration era* (2600 - 1900 BCE), which “shows a pronounced cultural homogeneity and the emergence of urban centers like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa,” and the *localization era* (1900 - 1300 BCE), “characterized by a blending of the patterns from the integration era with regional ceramic styles” (Feuerstein et al., p. 152). This last is a reconstitutive phase, a time of modification and adjustment, but likely not the “dark age” postulated by invasionists (*Ibid.*).

A Vedic society that has been relocated and rebuilt several times would harmonize well with Vedic ideology. Every evening at dusk the primordial struggle renews itself; demons take the fore as the gods, nourished from the day’s sacrifices, prepare for battle. They clash throughout the night until the dawn announces the victory of the gods. For the Vedicists, creation is continuous. Cyclical and repetitive, it does not happen once, but daily, and it relies upon the religious for continuance (Tyler, p. 23). Performance of the daily sacrifices connects the individual directly to the cosmos as an active participant in the creation of the world. Ritual behavior takes on cosmic significance every single day, a hinge upon which all is hung.

What happens when something goes wrong? India is particularly vulnerable to tectonic events even today; certainly the same can be said of the ancient past. The ground shakes violently and is lifted up, carrying with it the river. The crops of one settlement turn to dust while those of another are inundated. Such an environment poses problems for a highly ritualized culture. The people are forced to wonder what they have done wrong, what part of the ritual was performed incorrectly, who or what was responsible for the tragic turn of events. The rituals are examined, repeated and perfectly executed, yet the ground still shakes.

There is of course nothing that they can do. Perhaps they assume that the gods are displeased and so something must be *changed*. The river has relocated; perhaps the people must, too. The tide has turned, so to speak, against them, and so they

must move. It is true that they can follow the river, but it may rise against them. Perhaps the situation calls for drastic measures. One can imagine a purely political series of events having the same effect.

Rebirth is Vedic as well as Hindu doctrine. Death, at least to the Hindus, is not an end, but a beginning. To abandon a city, to leave the fields is not unthinkable, for it is only a temporary state. As Stephen Tyler himself said, "When we come to the realization that the Indus civilization was organized around the notion of society as a ritual organization, then we can understand why it was so uniform and conservative, and possibly why it disappeared only to live on." (Tyler, p. 39)

2. CONCLUSIONS

It seems clear that there is some relationship between the mythologies contained within the Hindu *Vedas* and the Norse *Eddas*. The path between them, shrouded by time and illiteracy, is nearly impossible to trace, but the remarkable persistence of certain structural features is heartening. It seems clear as well that the temporal relationship imagined to exist between them has likely been grossly underestimated. The persistence of the Aryan invasion theory, rooted in 19th century imperialism, creationism and racism, has been remarkable. Successful for decades at preventing accurate thought, the time for its retirement has surely arrived.

The theory maintains several indefensible positions. It insists that the term *Aryan* refers to a racial and linguistic group, which remains unproved by geneticists and disputed by linguists and Vedicists alike. It imagines the Aryans to have had a home outside of India and to have arrived as invaders; both claims are undocumented, unsupported by archaeological evidence, and apparently purged from the memory of the Indians themselves. It places the date of their arrival in India at around 1500 BCE, which remains unsubstantiated archaeologically and determined Biblically. The Aryans are said to have destroyed an advanced civilization and enforced their religious structure upon it despite the fact that they themselves had no writing. They are said to have brought the religion of the *Rig Veda* with them to India despite the fact that the native religion, as evidenced by archaeological finds, correlates perfectly with it.

Some claim that the Aryans adopted the culture of the natives almost entirely, maintaining linguistic dominance despite numerical inferiority. This too seems highly unlikely. If the Aryans did indeed adopt the culture of those they subjugated, why then did they not occupy their cities? Additionally, astronomical references in the *Rig Veda* allude to events that predate the third millennium BCE. While the mythos may not have been fully extant at that time, the tradition may trace its beginnings to that period. Considering the age of Sarasvatic and Mehrgarh civilization, it is not unreasonable.

In all probability, the Aryans of the *Rig Veda* lived in India long before 1900 BCE. Likely their presence was felt at the settlements on the Sarasvati, perhaps even at Mehrgarh. The further back in time they are placed, the more physical and linguistic variation is likely to be found among them. Perhaps they developed more than one language, particularly if an area was heavily populated by non-Indo-Europeans or separated geographically. Their culture was probably never the only one in India ; perhaps the Dravidians represent the intermingling of ancient Indo-Aryans and non-Indo-Europeans. Since even an early Indus date of 2500 BCE may be too late to serve as the *terminus post quem* of the *Rig Veda*, it may indeed represent the earliest span of recorded time in history.

The myths of the Norse will have come then more than three millennia later. Yet despite being even further removed from the *Vedas* than previously imagined, they grow strangely closer. The simple persistence of structure over so vast a period of time is remarkable; a testament, perhaps, to its functionality. The *Eddas* and *Vedas* are indeed related to each other, but not in the manner most often described. Their fraternity reaches much further back into pre-history than can currently be traveled, and their relationship, while more distant temporally, has been placed upon stronger, more solid ground. The relationship shared by two such disparate works is powerful testimony to the ultimate unity of the Indo-Europeans.

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